



Universitat de Lleida

Symbolic transitions as modalities of aging: intertextuality in the life and works of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe

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Symbolic Transitions as Modalities of Aging:
Intertextuality in the Life and Works of
Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe

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Introduction

The obituary that Rufus Wilmot Griswold published upon the death of Poe – which became to be known as the ‘Ludwig article,’ since Griswold wrote it under this pseudonym – played an important role in giving shape to the haunting and dark legend that would surround the figure of Poe ever after, especially as it would be expanded and republished in the memoir of the author that Griswold introduced in his edition of Poe’s collected works. Having been designated as the literary executor of Poe’s literary works, Griswold contributed to affirming a series of myths and inconsistencies about Poe that were apparently based on no actual evidence, and placed an important emphasis on what Griswold perceived as Poe’s morally negligent character as a result of his addictions. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, Griswold’s obituary of Poe acquires an important significance, since it is in the course of this text that Griswold establishes a parallelism between Poe’s devious personality and that of a literary character in one of Bulwer-Lytton’s novels. Thus, it can be argued that Griswold became the first critic to identify evidence of the intertextuality between these two authors and their lives. As a case in point, Griswold mentions that Poe “was in many respects like Francis Vivian in Bulwer’s novel of *The Caxtons*,”¹ thus not only contributing to establishing parallelisms between Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, but revealing how Griswold also played an active role in bridging the gaps between fiction and actual facts, in his comparison of Poe with a literary character in one of Bulwer-Lytton’s novels.

The concept of intertextuality, which was coined by poststructuralist critic Julia Kristeva, is currently used to refer to the multiple ways in which a literary text is made up of other texts, by means of citations or allusions, repetitions or transformations of earlier texts, or the unavoidable partaking in literary conventions that different texts

¹ Rufus Wilmot Griswold. “Death of Edgar A. Poe.” (*New York Daily Tribune*. 9th October 1849): 2, col. 4.

necessarily share. In her essay “Word, Dialogue, Novel,” published in the volume *Semeiotikè: Recherches pour une Sémanalyse* in the year 1969, Kristeva claims that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another,”² insofar as any text can be considered an intertext, that is, a text that exists only through its relation to other texts, and becomes the site of an intersection of countless texts. This is the general premise in which this thesis is grounded, as the global concept of intertextuality, envisioned by Julia Kristeva, will be used throughout all this study to provide a comparative analysis of the literary works of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe.

Before the concept of intertextuality became widespread in literary studies, there was the primary notion of influence of one author upon a later writer, who adopted – while also altered – aspects of the form, the style, or the subject matter of the literary works of an earlier author. In his seminal article “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” written in the year 1919, the poet and critic T.S. Eliot argues that “no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone,”³ thus contending that great poets are faithful to their predecessors and evolve in a concordant manner. Conversely, though, in his significant contribution to the notion of anxiety of influence, Harold Bloom presents a conception of tradition that differs from that of T.S. Eliot, inasmuch as Bloom claims that the poet rather engages in rebellion against tradition. By means of his seminal volume *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, published in the year 1973, Bloom contends that, in the composition of any work, influence is inescapable and this awareness evokes a feeling of anxiety in authors that urges them toward distorting the work of preceding writers.⁴ As Bloom further argues, this anxiety is exemplified by Freud’s interpretation of the Oedipal relation of a son to his father, which is often ambivalent, as it comprises admiration but also envy and even fear, as the later writer may try to safeguard his sense of creative freedom by addressing the earlier writer in a

² Quotation taken from Julia Kristeva. *The Kristeva Reader*. [Trans. Séan Hand, and Léon S. Roudiez] (Toril Moi. Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 37.

³ T.S. Eliot. “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” (*The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1920): 44.

⁴ Harold Bloom. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

defensive way. As will be shown, through Poe's changing attitude toward Bulwer-Lytton as a Victorian writer, Poe also felt this anxiety of influence as an emerging American writer who looked upon the other shore of the Atlantic with suspicion and admiration at the same time. Taking these premises into consideration, Bloom concludes that every literary work is a misinterpretation or misreading of a parent work, thus paving the ground for subsequent deconstructive concepts such as the notions of trace and 'différance,'⁵ which are also related to the general concept of intertextuality. According to Jacques Derrida, the components that establish the signified meaning of a text are never present and are never absent, as this meaning results from a trace, which consists of all the non-present differences that invest the text with the effect of having a meaning of its own, thus arguing that a text cannot have any evidently fixed and present meaning. Similarly, in relation to Derrida's notion of 'différance,' a text possesses the effect of having a significance, which is the product of its difference, but since this significance is never in actual presence, its specification is deferred from one reading to another in a movement of play. Accordingly, drawing on Derrida's premises, it is difference that makes possible the meaning of a text, while it is also difference which baffles the possibility of a decidable meaning. This comparative analysis of Poe's tales with Bulwer-Lytton's novels aims to identify the trace of Bulwer-Lytton in Poe's short fiction, based on the premise that a text never has a present meaning, while, drawing on the Derridean notion of 'différance,' it is difference that endows texts with a meaning, although significance is deferred from one reading to another.

Following Kristeva's seminal concept of intertextuality, Gérard Genette made a major contribution through the notion of palimpsest in his volume *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, published in the year 1982, taking it as a metaphor that refers to the presence of a text in a later text, which would lead Genette to coin the broad concept of transtextuality to address literary texts derived from earlier texts and their relations with them.⁶ According to Genette, there are five different types of

⁵ Jacques Derrida. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*. (Peggy Kamuf. Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁶ Gérard Genette. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. [Trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky] (Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1982).

transtextuality, referring to: architextuality, as the designation of a text as part of a particular genre; paratextuality, as the relation between one text and the paratextual components such as titles or prefaces that surround it; metatextuality, as the explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text; intertextuality, as the partial presence of a text within a later text integrating it in an explicit way through allusion, quotations or plagiarism; and hypertextuality, as the global relation of a later text – which is known as hypertext – with a preceding text – which is called hypotext – involving its transformation, modification, elaboration, or extension.⁷ It is significant to notice that Genette refers to intertextuality as one type of transtextuality, since, according to Genette, intertextuality involves relations between fragments of texts at a microstructural level, whereas, Kristeva's broader concept of intertextuality remains closer to Genette's notion of hypertextuality. Accordingly, drawing on Genette's terminology, this thesis is grounded in the notion of hypertextuality, taking Bulwer-Lytton's novels as hypotext and Poe's tales as hypertext, while, as will be shown, on some occasions, Poe also exemplified Genette's concepts of architextuality – as Poe's short stories also belong to the same literary genres as Bulwer-Lytton's novels – metatextuality – as Poe offered critical commentary on some of Bulwer-Lytton's works through his reviews – and intertextuality – since, as will be shown, Poe made explicit allusion to Bulwer-Lytton in his fiction, for example, in the case of Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man." In addition to Kristeva's more classic term of intertextuality, which is referred to in this thesis, Mary Orr argues that emerging terminology may even replace the concept of intertextuality in the future through terms such as interdiscursivity, interdisciplinarity, and particularly, hypertextuality, especially given the extraordinary importance that new technologies have been acquiring.⁸ Nonetheless, for the purpose of

⁷ Furthermore, according to Genette, there are different hypertextual practices. One of these practices involves the transformation of a particular text, which can be through *transposition* (i.e. transformation by means of reduction, extension, or substitution of any component), *parody* (i.e. transformation through satire), and *transvestism* (i.e. transformation of a text, maintaining its essential aspects, but with a change in style, or using colloquial language). Another hypertextual practice comprises the imitation of the style of an author, of a particular time, or a particular genre through *forgerie* (i.e. a serious imitation with the purpose of paying homage), *pastiche* (i.e. humorous kind of imitation), and *charge* (i.e. a kind of pastiche, but with a demeaning and denigrating purpose).

⁸ Mary Orr. *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2008): 21.

this thesis, Kristeva's classic term of intertextuality will be used, with specific references to some of Genette's terms commented above.

In relation to Genette's notion of metatextuality, in his role as literary critic, Poe wrote a series of reviews of some of Bulwer-Lytton's literary works, such as his historical novel *Rienzi, The Last of the Tribunes* (1835), his crime novel *Night and Morning* (1841), the compilation of some of his articles and essays under the title of *The Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton* (1841), and a collection of poetry *Poems by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (1845), which explicitly show that Poe had read an important number of Bulwer-Lytton's literary works comprising prose, poetry, and miscellaneous essays, and that he was also well aware of the status that Bulwer-Lytton was achieving as a highly-reputed Victorian writer. Throughout his reviews, Poe also displays his evolving views on the Victorian writer and his literary output, showing his appreciation for him, but also giving evidence of those aspects that he particularly disdained, mostly his style of writing and the complexity of his prose as a Victorian writer. Following a chronological order, Poe first published a review of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Rienzi, The Last of the Tribunes* in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in February 1836, a review in which Poe first showed his admiration for Bulwer-Lytton as a writer in the following terms:

We have long learned to reverence the fine intellect of Bulwer. We take up any production of his pen with a positive certainty that, in reading it, the wildest passions of our nature, the most profound of our thoughts, the brightest visions of our fancy, and the most ennobling and lofty of our aspirations will, in due turn, be enkindled within us. We feel sure of rising from the perusal a wiser if not a better man. In no instance are we deceived.⁹

As the review above implies, when Poe was in his late twenties, he gave significant evidence of his appreciation of the Victorian writer, and judging from his words, Poe also subtly referred to Bulwer-Lytton as a source of influence, declaring that, in the perusal of the Victorian writer's novels, his imagination was necessarily unleashed, and as a writer, he felt that he was roused into action. In his volume, *Edgar Allan Poe's*

⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Review of *Rienzi, The Last of Roman Tribunes*." (*Southern Literary Messenger*. February 1836): 198.

Contributions to Alexander's Weekly Messenger, Clarence S. Brigham also attributed to Poe the review with the title "Bulwer Used Up," published in the magazine *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* in May 1840,¹⁰ in which Poe appeared to cast some doubt on Bulwer-Lytton's style, but also praised the Victorian writer for his "warm passions and glowing imagination."¹¹ Likewise, when Poe was in his thirties, he also published a review of Bulwer-Lytton's crime novel *Night and Morning* in *Graham's Magazine* in April 1841, in which, even if he states that his opinion about Bulwer-Lytton's novel is not entirely positive, Poe still displays his appreciation of the Victorian writer, stating that,

In regard to *Night and Morning* we cannot agree with that critical opinion which considers it the best novel of its author. It is only not his worst. It is not as good as *Eugene Aram*, nor as *Rienzi* – and is not at all comparable with *Ernest Maltravers*. Upon the whole it is a good book. It merits beyond doubt overbalance its defects, and if we have not dwelt upon the former with as much unction as upon the latter, it is because the Bulwerian beauties are precisely of that secondary character which never fails of the fullest public appreciation.¹²

Judging from the reviews quoted above, it can be claimed that Poe became an admirer of Bulwer-Lytton's fictional works, and his knowledge derived not only from the novels that he examined in his reviews, but also from other of Bulwer-Lytton's fictional works that he had read. Nonetheless, as Poe came of age as a writer, he would gradually turn into a more critical reviewer of Bulwer-Lytton with regard to his miscellaneous essays, and especially in respect of his poetry. In short, Poe still seemed to adopt a favourable attitude for the most part as regards his views on the Victorian writer in the review he wrote of *The Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton* (1841), which was published in *Graham's Magazine* in November 1841, in which he judged the Victorian writer, declaring that, in the course of his essays,

His intellect [is] rather well balanced than lofty – rather comprehensive than penetrative. His taste is exquisite. His style, in its involution and obscurity,

¹⁰ Clarence S. Brigham. *Edgar Allan Poe's Contributions to Alexander's Weekly Messenger*. (Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1943): 82-83.

¹¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Bulwer Used Up." (*Alexander's Weekly Messenger* 4.19. 6th May 1840): 2, col. 4.

¹² Edgar Allan Poe. "Review of *Night and Morning*." (*Graham's Magazine*. April 1841): 197.

partakes of the involution of his thoughts. Apart from his mere intellect, however, – or rather as a portion of that intellect – we recognize in his every written word the keenest appreciation of the right, the beautiful, and the true. Thus he is a man worthy of all reverence, and we do not hesitate to say that we look upon the charges of immoral tendency which have been so pertinaciously adduced against his fictions, as absurdly little and untenable, in the mass.¹³

Nonetheless, by far, Poe's judgement of Bulwer-Lytton would prove most severe when it came to evaluating the Victorian writer's poetry in a collection entitled *Poetry by Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer* (1845), as Poe would even go as far as to state that, in his opinion, "Bulwer was no poet,"¹⁴ thus showing that the last references that Poe would make to Bulwer-Lytton in his writings gradually acquired a more critical tone, in particular, with regard to Bulwer-Lytton's complex prose, which Poe would censure, stating that the Victorian writer "wraps one sentence in another *ad infinitum*."¹⁵ To use Harold Bloom's term, it can be claimed that Poe's 'anxiety of influence' and growing detachment from Bulwer-Lytton underlined Poe's increasing maturity as an author. And yet, in general terms, it can be argued that, with the exception of Bulwer-Lytton's poetic compositions and the intricate style of his prose, Poe held the Victorian writer in high esteem and would, for the most part, underscore his favourable opinion of Bulwer-Lytton in the important number of reviews that he would write on the works of the Victorian writer.

In addition to the reviews already referred to above, there are also some other reviews that have been tentatively attributed to Poe, as is the case with a notice on Bulwer-Lytton's volume *The Student: A Series of Papers* (1835) and a review of his novel *Zanoni* (1842), which are highly flattering and appreciative. As a case in point, in a manuscript of the Mabbott Collection at the University of Iowa, one of the editors of Poe's collected works, Thomas Ollive Mabbott identified Poe as the author of a notice on Bulwer-Lytton's *The Student* that was published in the *American and Daily*

¹³ Edgar Allan Poe. "Review of *The Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton*." (*Graham's Magazine*. November 1841): 252, col.2.

¹⁴ Edgar Allan Poe. "Review of *Poems by Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer*." (*Broadway Journal* 1.6. 8th February 1845): 82.

¹⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. "Marginalia: Item CXLVIII." Rufus Wilmot Griswold. Ed. *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe, vol. III*. (New York: J.S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, Nassau-Street, 1850): 559.

Advertiser in 1835, which, even if tentatively ascribed to Poe, turns into one of the most positive reviews published on Bulwer-Lytton in the American press of the time, as its author exclaims,

Mr. Bulwer is a brilliant instance of successful authorship. He is an author by profession, also by inclination, as indeed without a natural bent and fondness he could not have been so successful. He makes a business of writing, and a profitable business it is to him. Each of his works puts a large sum of money in his purse. He is far better paid for his literary labor than any living British writer, and but few before him have turned their pens to such worldly advantage. To have reaped such solid fruits with the accompanying reputation, and to continue to reap them, is a sign of the possession of no common powers. He is unquestionably a writer of great versatility of faculties, of uncommon activity and sprightliness of mind, of extensive reading, and rare talent in turning his reading and knowledge to account.¹⁶

This quotation above reflects Bulwer-Lytton's remarkable status as a highly-reputed Victorian writer, and it also demonstrates that Bulwer-Lytton was well-known in American society, even at an early stage of his literary career, while, at the same time, it shows the significant positive critical reception that some Victorian writers, such as Bulwer-Lytton, enjoyed in the United States at the time. Together with this aforementioned notice of Bulwer-Lytton's volume *The Student*, Poe has also been identified as the author of a review of Bulwer-Lytton's metaphysical novel *Zanoni*, which was published in *Graham's Magazine* in 1842, which was tentatively ascribed to Poe by the critic Burton Pollin.¹⁷ In this review of *Zanoni*, Poe offers a positive review of the novel, again even claiming that Bulwer-Lytton's novel "is a valuable addition to our imaginative literature,"¹⁸ thus once more giving evidence of his appreciation of the Victorian writer's literary works of fiction.

In addition to all these reviews acknowledged as written by Poe or attributed to him in which the American writer reveals his knowledge about the literary works of the Victorian writer, Poe would also refer explicitly to Bulwer-Lytton in his personal letters.

¹⁶ Edgar Allan Poe (allegedly). "Notice of Bulwer's *The Student*." (*American and Daily Advertiser*. 11th July 1835).

¹⁷ Burton R. Pollin. "Bulwer-Lytton's Influence on Poe's Works and Ideas, especially for an Author's 'Preconceived Design'." (*The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 1.1. Spring 2000): 5-12.

¹⁸ Edgar Allan Poe (allegedly). "Review of New Books." (*Graham's Magazine*. June 1842): 355, col. 2.

As another example of metatextuality, in an epistle that Poe addressed to the American publisher and editor Thomas Willis White, dated 30th April 1835, Poe made an explicit allusion to Bulwer-Lytton in defence of his gothic short fiction, which Poe was surely familiar with, thus declaring that “the first men in England have not thought writings of this nature unworthy of their talents, and I have good reason to believe that some very high names valued themselves principally upon this species of literature.”¹⁹ By defending the gothic short fiction that Bulwer-Lytton wrote at an early stage of his literary career, Poe was ultimately trying to give support to his own writings, which he felt had found a transatlantic counterpart in those of Bulwer-Lytton. In fact, in the course of his letter to the editor Thomas Willis White, Poe attempted to defend the grotesque topic of his tale “Berenice” (1835), stating that writers such as Bulwer-Lytton, through his short stories “Manuscript Found in a Madhouse” (1829) and “Monos and Daimonos” (1830), had also resorted to the same kind of fiction and had turned into highly-reputed authors, thereby trying to establish a subtle and preliminary parallelism between his own fiction and that of Bulwer-Lytton.

Given the fact that, through his reviews and letters, Poe gave evidence of having read Bulwer-Lytton’s novels, essays, poetry, and short fiction widely, some contemporary critics suggested that Poe might have been influenced by Bulwer-Lytton’s fiction, especially given the echoes and the thematic connections that some of Poe’s tales present with Bulwer-Lytton’s novels. One of the first critics to notice this influence was Poe’s scholar Burton R. Pollin, who approached Poe’s literary works from the field of comparative studies, and in some of his articles, he compiled some preliminary intertextual links between Poe’s tale “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) and Bulwer-Lytton’s fiction,²⁰ Poe’s short stories and Bulwer-Lytton’s historical novel *Rienzi, The Last of the Tribunes*,²¹ and also referred to Poe’s reviews of some of Bulwer-Lytton’s literary

¹⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Thomas Willis White.” (30th April 1835. See *Poe’s Letters on the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p3504300.htm>

²⁰ Burton R. Pollin. “Bulwer-Lytton and ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’.” (*American Notes and Queries*. September 1965): 7-8.

²¹ Burton R. Pollin. “Bulwer’s *Rienzi* as a Multiple Source for Poe.” (*Poe Studies* 29.2. December 1996): 66-68.

works.²² Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton scholar Allan Conrad Christensen also mentions Poe as one of the authors that, to use Christensen's words, "paid tribute at various times to the serious artistry and intellectual vigor"²³ of the Victorian writer. Likewise, critic George H. Spies also acknowledges the influence that Bulwer-Lytton exerted on Poe, and most importantly, in his article, Spies identifies Poe's evolving views on Bulwer-Lytton, as the American writer seemed to change his appreciation of the Victorian author at some stage in his literary career, as evidence of Bloom's notion of the anxiety of influence. In this respect, Spies focuses on a series of Bulwer-Lytton's stylistic features that Poe appeared to acknowledge as weaknesses in the Victorian writer eventually, since, in the course of Poe's reviews of Bulwer-Lytton's literary work, the American author gave evidence of his displeasure with the extensive length, the disunity of place, the complex language, the melodramatic twists in the plots, and the excessive use of metaphor that he admitted finding in Bulwer-Lytton's novels. Nonetheless, Spies reaches the conclusion that, in spite of this change in appreciation at some stage, Poe remained a lifetime admirer of Bulwer-Lytton's works, as he claims that,

It should be made clear that Poe did not end his days as a literary critic altogether negating the artistry of the man he had at first so highly and unreservedly praised. Although his flattering estimation of Bulwer-Lytton modified considerably on specific points after 1836 and later became what a modern reader would consider more realistic, Poe continued to feel that there were 'many fine thoughts' in Bulwer-Lytton's novels.²⁴

Together with Rufus Wilmot Griswold's obituary of Poe and the reviews that Poe wrote of the literary works of Bulwer-Lytton throughout his life, which establish a clear connection between Poe and Bulwer-Lytton, the hypothesis that George Spies postulates in his article, whereby he proposes that at some stage in his career Poe began to grow somehow detached from Bulwer-Lytton's influence, gives shape to a point of departure for this thesis.

²² Burton R. Pollin. "Bulwer-Lytton's Influence on Poe's Works and Ideas, especially for an Author's 'Preconceived Design'." (*The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 1.1. Spring 2000): 5-12.

²³ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): x.

²⁴ George H. Spies. "Edgar Allan Poe's Changing Critical Evaluation of the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton." (*Kyushu American Literature* 17. 1976): 6.

The supposition that George Spies makes in his article with respect to Poe's changing evaluation of Bulwer-Lytton at a specific point in time ultimately reflects a significant symbolic transition in the life of Poe, which found its counterpart in his metaphorical detachment from the Victorian writer whom he had once aspired to emulate. The period of time to which Spies makes reference in his article as determining Poe's metaphorical detachment from Bulwer-Lytton precisely coincides with a significant turning-point in his life, which was the death of his foster father, John Allan, and his eventual exclusion from the Allan household, since, as will be shown, this symbolic transition would deeply condition Poe's identity from then onwards and would also determine the attitude that he would adopt towards his own aging process. Being excluded from the Allan family, Poe felt that his aspirations and prospects to excel socially as a Southern gentleman were shattered, and the loss of this social status also brought with it his estrangement from the highly-reputed and aristocratic Victorian writer, even though, in spite of its intermittent quality, Poe's appreciation of Bulwer-Lytton as a Victorian author would extend throughout his life. In this respect, this dissertation aims to identify and analyse the significant intertextuality existing between the prose fiction of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe in order to argue that, despite their different cultural and national background, they can be regarded as transatlantic double-figures of each other, as, not only do their literary works present a significant number of parallelisms in terms of literary genres, themes, plots, and characters, as will be shown, but their lives also appear to run parallel to one another through a series of turning-points or symbolic transitions that befell them during their respective processes of aging.

Poe's evolving critical evaluation of Bulwer-Lytton as a writer also becomes significant inasmuch as it anticipates the rise and fall – to use Leslie Mitchell's metaphor²⁵ – that Bulwer-Lytton's fame suffered after the Victorian period came to an end. According to M.H. Abrams, the canon formation involves the process whereby an author or a literary work comes to be recognised as canonical and it responds to factors

²⁵ See Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

such as, the concurrence of scholars from different schools of thought, the significant influence of an author in the work of other writers, the frequent reference to an author or a literary work within the discourses of a cultural community, and the general assignment of an author or text in education curricula.²⁶ Nonetheless, the boundaries of a literary canon are the result of a wavering consensus and remain indefinite, since, it may also be determined in accordance with the politics of power, and on occasions, an author who has remained for long on the fringe of the literary canon might even be ultimately transferred to a position of eminence within the same canon. One significant aim in cultural poetics is to subvert the distinction in traditional criticism between literary authors and works considered within the established literary canon, and those that are not regarded as an integral part of it. In this respect, taking into consideration Abrams' factor involving the influence of an author in the work of other writers to include an author in the literary canon, this thesis aims to bring Bulwer-Lytton's literary works into focus as a Victorian writer, through the influence he exerted on Poe.

A comparative study of the life and works of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe will underline their transatlantic cultural identity and the changing reputations of these authors from their time in their contemporary societies to their current reception in their respective countries. According to Leslie Mitchell, in the Victorian period, Bulwer-Lytton was recognised as a great writer and one of the most distinguished authors of his time, as the sales of his books rivalled those of Charles Dickens. Moreover, he contributed to the creation and the development of different literary genres, such as that of Newgate fiction and the silver-fork novel. Nonetheless, as Leslie Mitchell further argues, the haunting influence that Bulwer-Lytton exerted during his time appeared to come to a close after the First World War, apparently owing to the fact that the didactic tone, the dense style, and the Victorian themes – ranging from medievalism to metaphysics – which, for the most part, characterised Bulwer-Lytton's novels, appeared rather remote and particularly demanding to the modern reader.²⁷ It can thus be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton's fame declined in the first half of the twentieth-century precisely

²⁶ M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999): 29.

²⁷ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): xx.

because his literary works were remarkably representative of Victorian times and values. In fact, it is significant that Bulwer-Lytton was highly praised in Samuel Smiles' seminal Victorian work *Self-Help*, published in 1859,²⁸ as a successful man who made a name for himself in the literary field. On the other hand, in his volume comprising biographies of leading Victorian men and women, Lytton Strachey omitted any reference to Bulwer-Lytton in his volume *Eminent Victorians*, published in 1918.²⁹ Hence, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton's fame declined as a result of a change in values, since he was extolled during the Victorian period as one of its most paradigmatic writers, whilst, with few exceptions, for the modern readership, his name seems to have faded into oblivion.

This changing appraisal of the figure of Bulwer-Lytton as a highly-reputed author significantly found its correlation in Poe's evolving opinion towards his much-admired Victorian writer, precisely on account of those features that had turned Bulwer-Lytton into being quintessentially Victorian; features which ultimately were to become those same characteristics that would cause his fictions no longer to attract the modern reader to the same degree. If Bulwer-Lytton fell in and out of favour in his country as a representative Victorian man of letters, Poe rather appeared to experience the opposite process, since, the celebration of the bicentenary of his birth in the year 2009, new studies of the American writer have proliferated and have grown in number, thus sanctioning his contemporary popularity. Nonetheless, despite current scholarly attention given to Poe, both in the country of his birth and abroad, there is evidence that confirms that Poe was hardly considered representative of the American society of his time. As Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman claim, Poe has mostly been alleged to be out of step with his own day and culture, particularly insofar as Poe's tales were rediscovered first by Charles Baudelaire and the symbolist poets, and subsequently, by the French tradition, which read Poe's works mostly from a psychoanalytical approach, through the works of Marie Bonaparte, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida. However, in spite of this generally-held opinion, the proposition that Rosenheim and Rachman

²⁸ Samuel Smiles. (Peter W. Sinnema. Ed. *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct*. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2002).

²⁹ Lytton Strachey. *Eminent Victorians*. (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009).

mostly defend is that Poe's literary endeavours were actually based within the specific cultural arena that characterised antebellum America. In fact, in their aim to historicise Poe's work and to approach it from a social and cultural perspective, Rosenheim and Rachman argue that "Poe's syncopated relation to American culture, at once both in and out of step, gives his writing its unique power to clarify the American tradition,"³⁰ thus ensnaring the reader to join in a dialectal process of difference and identification. For most of the twentieth-century, Poe underwent a continuous process of positive reevaluation, as Poe's name eluded F.R. Leavis in his well-known volume *The Great Tradition*, published in 1948,³¹ but Poe's poetry and tales, his essays and reviews, his only novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), and even his metaphysical treaty *Eureka* (1848) were mentioned in Harold Bloom's volume *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, published in 1994.³² Hence, Poe's fame as an author has been increasing in such a significant manner that his works have decidedly become an integral part of the western canon.

This thesis also aims to draw a renewed attention to Bulwer-Lytton as an eminent Victorian writer, and approach Poe's short fiction through the discipline of comparative literature – as finding its reflection in the metaphorical mirror of Bulwer-Lytton's prose fiction, making use of the theories of transatlantic studies as one of its methodological frameworks. According to Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor, the field of transatlantic literary studies is grounded in ideas of crossing and connection that contribute to rethinking and reshaping the ways that national and cultural identity has been formulated.³³ In this respect, the critic Paul Giles claims that American literature appears in a different light when it is approached from a British cultural perspective, in the same way that British literature reveals new aspects that are brought into play by the

³⁰ Shawn Rosenheim, and Stephen Rachman. "Introduction: Beyond 'The Problem of Poe'." (Shawn Rosenheim, and Stephen Rachman. Eds. *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): xii.

³¹ F.R. Leavis. *The Great Tradition*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

³² Harold Bloom. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995).

³³ Susan Manning, and Andrew Taylor. "Introduction." (Susan Manning, and Andrew Taylor. Eds. *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007): 4.

reflecting mirrors of American literature.³⁴ Likewise, within the field of transatlantic literary studies, Paul Giles particularly draws attention to the years after the American Revolution until the middle of the nineteenth-century as the significant span of time in which British and American literature mostly twisted and intertwined with each other, inasmuch as, according to Paul Giles, American literature became a bifocal phenomenon with significant British elements, given the fact that, since its inception, American literature developed in parallel to its British counterpart.³⁵ Hence, even within the field of comparative literature, the thread of transatlantic literary studies differs from the search of an ideal universality, as characteristic of the origins of comparative literature – rooted in the aim of establishing dialogues between the local and the universal owing to the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth-century – which, ironically, as Paul Giles contends, would eventually give way to a broader and more international approach, as the advent of transatlantic literary studies subsequently ascertained.³⁶ In a ground-breaking study about the literary relations between Great Britain and the United States based on cultural variances and similarities, Stephen Spender contends that, until the end of the First World War, American writers either reacted against Europe or gravitated towards it. However, he posits that the shadow image of Great Britain often conditioned their attitudes towards their own nation, while the position of English writers with respect to the United States did not find the same standards of comparison. Conversely, though, it was after the First World War that American writers mostly began to direct their gaze towards their own country, thus turning themselves away from the European past towards the American future.³⁷ In this respect, as Stephen Spender further argues, the historical relationship between American and British literature conditioned one another particularly during this span of time, thus making American and British writers more self-conscious with respect to each other.

³⁴ Paul Giles. *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001): 1.

³⁵ Paul Giles. *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001): 2.

³⁶ Paul Giles. *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730-1860*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001): 12.

³⁷ Stephen Spender. *Love-Hate Relations: A Study of Anglo-American Sensibilities*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974): 10.

Within this context of transatlantic literary relations, as an American writer, Poe illustrated the premise that American writers often looked across the Atlantic upon English writers in whom to mirror themselves, as was the case of Bulwer-Lytton, who was highly-admired in Victorian Britain and, also, on the other shore of the Atlantic. Poe's praising words for Bulwer-Lytton's novels, especially at an early stage of the American writer's literary career, show his admiration for the Victorian writer, which would find its correlation in the influence Bulwer-Lytton would exert on his writing through a series of intertextual links that will be analysed in the different chapters of this thesis. Although it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton's shadow upon Poe would last for a long time, drawing further on George Spies' hypothesis about Poe's changing evaluation of Bulwer-Lytton, it came to a point when this transatlantic literary connection became more intricate, since, as an American writer, Poe would grow somehow more detached from the Victorian writer, especially once Poe's aspirations to emulate the great English writers on the other shore of the Atlantic became unfeasible. Poe's virtual initial exclusion and subsequent inclusion with respect to the American literary canon are also rooted in issues related to cultural identity. Poe's family background was deeply-grounded in Europe, and he spent an important part of his formative years as an adolescent in England and Scotland, while his foster father, John Allan, would ensure that his foster son be brought up through the edifying literature of the European classics. This European background necessarily conditioned Poe's early approach to literature, first as a reader and then as a writer, even though, the demise of his foster father and his exclusion from the Allan family, would lead him to grow estranged from his past background and sanction his independence both as a writer and as an individual. Conversely, as a Victorian writer, Bulwer-Lytton became representative of his nation and time, and did not gaze across the Atlantic for literary doubles to emulate, and yet, in his active role in the colonies as a politician, he would display his praise for former colonies which had attained their independence, especially on the other shore of the Atlantic. In his novels, Bulwer-Lytton would often make references to young men who achieved success through leaving the English metropolis and who settled in Australia or in the United States. As a politician as well as a writer,

Bulwer-Lytton declared his belief that America was a land of opportunities where many young men could find a brighter future. Hence, it could be argued that, for Poe, England represented the past, while, Bulwer-Lytton ended his days gazing towards the other shore of the Atlantic as the future.

In addition to the sense of location as shaping the cultural identity of these respective countries, the notion of time was also endowed with cultural connotations on both sides of the Atlantic insofar as there was a tendency to equate Europe with the past and America with what was to come in the future. In the context of transatlantic literary studies, Robert Weisbuch refers to the fact that the Anglo-American contest ultimately consists in a struggle between two different senses of cultural time, between British 'lateness' and American 'earliness,' which is reflected in the nineteenth-century fiction that arose on both sides of the Atlantic.³⁸ Stretching this parallelism further, upon dealing with issues related to transatlantic cultural identities and cultural time, Stephen Spender coined a transatlantic metaphor, claiming that, at this historical stage, the British nation turned into a couple of aging parents, whereas the American nation could be regarded as their children, who had become independent and had left them behind.³⁹ Similarly, bearing in mind the schism between British 'lateness' and American 'earliness' as transatlantic cultural interpretations of time in the nineteenth-century, Robert Weisbuch also makes use of the metaphor of cultural aging, thus declaring that, to use Weisbuch's words, "nineteenth-century England often appeared to its literary inhabitants as in the extreme decline of old age,"⁴⁰ while America held on to its youth as its oldest tradition and to cultural earliness as a substitute for the past and cultural maturity that allegedly characterised the comparative model of the old continent.

Judging from the metaphor of cultural aging mentioned above that symbolically and broadly associates the old continent with age and America with youth for historical reasons, it can be argued that the prevailing conceptualisations of aging at the time were

³⁸ Robert Weisbuch. *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995): 109.

³⁹ Stephen Spender. *Love-Hate Relations: A Study of Anglo-American Sensibilities*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974): 3.

⁴⁰ Robert Weisbuch. *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995): 121.

conditioned by the intrinsic connectedness between the perceptions of place and time as culturally-determined. According to Karen Chase, the discourses of aging began to gain unprecedented attention in Victorian Britain, to the extent that old age, not as a lived experience, but as a cultural, social, legal, and medical event, was alleged to be a phenomenon of the nineteenth-century. In this respect, as Karen Chase further argues, it was at that time that the elderly subject became a category in medical and sociological research, initiatives began to be proposed towards public provision for old age through a system of pensions, and different social institutions acquired a central place and gave shape to the conditions of Victorian aging.⁴¹ Given this social dimension of aging, Teresa Mangum claims that Victorians were often taught to perform their old age in specific forms, which were correspondingly reproduced in cultural manifestations such as literature and art,⁴² thus anticipating and complying with Margaret Morganroth Gullette's well-known premise that individuals are ultimately aged by culture.⁴³ Nonetheless, as Teresa Mangum further contends, categorising when old age began was complicated by the inconsistency of the criteria that Victorians used to determine age,⁴⁴ and in addition to these ambiguities of definition, there was the individual's experience of aging and the individual estimation of the aging condition.⁴⁵ In this respect, taking into consideration the individual dimension of aging, Helen Small claims that one important change that aging involves is not biological in nature, but actually, psychological, as she identifies the existence of a 'double-think,' insofar as Small argues that, as they grow older, some individuals devote more time to thinking about their aging process, whereas others spend an important amount of their time trying not to think about aging and everything that it involves.⁴⁶ Drawing on Small's notion of the 'double-think' involved in aging, this thesis also aims to identify this concept as

⁴¹ Karen Chase. *The Victorians and Old Age*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 6.

⁴² Teresa Mangum. "Little Women: The Aging Female Character in Nineteenth-Century British Children's Literature." (Kathleen Woodward. Ed. *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 59.

⁴³ Margaret Morganroth Gullette. *Aged by Culture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ Teresa Mangum. "Growing Old: Age." (Herbert F. Tucker. Ed. *A Companion to Victorian Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): 99.

⁴⁵ Karen Chase. *The Victorians and Old Age*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 4.

⁴⁶ Helen Small. *The Long Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 272.

exemplified by the differing approaches to aging that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe displayed for the most part, envisioning the concept of aging not as a synonym of old age but rather as a life-course process, bringing to the fore a series of symbolic transitions in the lives of the authors that will underscore their different modalities of aging. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to adopt a more conscious attitude towards his process of aging, as, even in his youth, he often reflected about the passage of time, as he grew gradually aware of having been chosen as heir of a family lineage and gained insight into a virtual sense of prolongation as his family lineage extended in time. Conversely, though, Poe remained mostly detached from any reflection on his own process of aging, since, having been excluded from the Allan household at a considerably advanced age, and thus, having to abandon the alluring prospects of his youth, Poe felt compelled to live fast as a result of a virtual fear of lateness in a young country that mostly praised youth, which, given his origins and aspirations, would metaphorically condemn him to age prematurely and would eventually, to use Peter Ackroyd's words, cut Poe's life short.

It can thus be contended that prevalent cultural and social perceptions of aging conditioned the aging process of individuals inasmuch as the attitude towards aging that individuals adopted also contributed to giving shape to these cultural conceptualisations of aging. As reflective of the philosophical movement of Utilitarianism that prevailed at the time, it was contended that collective progress depended on the lived experience and fulfilment of individual citizens, and as Maureen Moran explains, given the Utilitarian emphasis on individualism, Victorians grew particularly fascinated with biography and autobiographical writing, and especially, with the way an individual aged and struggled to maturity.⁴⁷ This thesis is grounded in the discipline of psychobiography, which, according to M.H. Abrams, involves the life of authors as focused on their psychological development, looking for evidence both on external sources and on the writings of the authors, while giving significant importance to the role of unconscious and disguised motives in giving shape to the personality of the authors.⁴⁸ During his late

⁴⁷ Maureen Moran. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. (London: Continuum, 2006): 111.

⁴⁸ M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999): 250.

years, Bulwer-Lytton started writing an autobiography, which would mainly focus on the early years of his life, and after his demise, his son Robert Lytton took on the task of his father, while Bulwer-Lytton's grandson, Victor, would also follow the family tradition and would write another biography of his illustrious grandfather, thus showing the importance they attached to family lineage and legacy. Likewise, throughout the twentieth-century, different biographers would also produce volumes placing emphasis on a series of aspects of Bulwer-Lytton's life, such as Michael Sadleir – who mostly focused on Bulwer-Lytton's troublesome relationship with his wife Rosina, Thomas Hay Sweet Escott – whose book mostly revolves about Bulwer-Lytton's status and social aspects of his career, Charles Snyder – who wrote a political biography of Bulwer-Lytton, Sibylla Jane Flower – who produced an instructive biography of Bulwer-Lytton that mainly focuses on literary aspects, and Leslie Mitchell – whose biography of Bulwer-Lytton is the most recent volume to date, and which, within the contemporary context of Neo-Victorianism, aims to give Bulwer-Lytton the credit he deserves as an eminent Victorian writer. If Bulwer-Lytton showed a significant insight into his aging process as he began to write his autobiography, Poe never displayed the same degree of explicit consciousness towards his approach to aging. Nonetheless, as will be shown, when he was asked to produce some autobiographical sketches for inclusion in edited collections of his works, he was found to construct his profile with inexact data and even appeared to lie consciously about his age, trying to pretend to be younger, thus implicitly showing some covert concern about age and evincing age to be a construct. And yet, after his premature death at the age of forty, Poe's tragic life became as much a subject of discussion as his literary works through an important number of biographies that range from early accounts of his life such as that by John Ingram, George Edward Woodberry, James Harrison, and Hervey Allen to the more modern biographies of Poe by Jeffrey Meyers and James Hutchisson, and particularly, the comprehensive and most widely-considered authoritative biographies of Poe by Arthur Hobson Quinn and Kenneth Silverman, along with the most contemporary biographies of Poe published recently by Kevin Hayes and Peter Ackroyd in the year of the bicentenary of Poe's birth.

An analysis of the significant intertextual connections that can be established between the literary works of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe will also pave the ground for a biographical reading of their prose fiction. Taking into consideration the major role attached to autobiographical writings, personal papers, letters, and biographies in addition to literary works, this thesis is also grounded within the theoretical framework of the critical theory of New Historicism, which critic Stephen Greenblatt first referred to in his volume *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, published in the year 1982.⁴⁹ In contrast with former positivist literary studies, which conceived of history as a mere background to set a literary work in, New Historicism envisions the literary text as inextricably linked to the institutions, social practices, and discourses that give shape to the culture of a specific time and place. In this respect, New Historicism contrasts with the precepts of the literary studies of New Criticism, which, in favour of critical formalism, contend that the concern of literary criticism consists in the close reading of a literary work as an independent entity, rather than the circumstances or the historical positioning of a work. Although John Crowe Ransom first coined the term in his book *The New Criticism*, published in the year 1941,⁵⁰ critic Matthew Arnold already established the principles of New Criticism in his essay “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” written in 1864, when he defended that the method of examining a literary text involved not making reference to anything outside the text itself.⁵¹ As opposed to New Criticism, the tenets of New Historicism result from concepts pertaining to poststructuralist theorists such as Louis Althusser, insofar as it is claimed that ideology manifests itself in diverse ways in the discourses of different institutions, including literature,⁵² and anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s view that culture is shaped by a distinctive set of signifying systems.⁵³ In particular, though, New Historicism focuses on Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse, which arises as the primary concern of

⁴⁹ Stephen Greenblatt. *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982).

⁵⁰ John Crowe Ransom. *The New Criticism*. (New York: Praeger, 1979).

⁵¹ Matthew Arnold. “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.” (*The National Review* 2.1. November 1864): 280-307.

⁵² Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

⁵³ Clifford Geertz. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.” (*The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973): 3-30.

literary criticism – displacing the prevalence of the text itself – and is envisioned, not as the product of a timeless linguistic system, but as the result of particular social, historical, and cultural conditions.⁵⁴ As M.H. Abrams claims, within the framework of New Historicism, the manifest meanings of a text are interpreted as a disguise of underlying meanings of a subtext, which cannot be overtly expressed because they are “suppressed by psychic or ideological discursive necessities,”⁵⁵ hence the manifest meanings of a text become a distortion or a displacement of its real meanings, that is, representations which “turn out to be the writer’s psychic compulsions or the material realities of history,”⁵⁶ as will be shown in this thesis, through a procedure that philosopher Paul Ricoeur names hermeneutics of suspicion.⁵⁷ In addition to Foucault’s concept of discourse, New Historicism also draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic quality of literary texts, insofar as a literary text becomes a site for the dialogic interaction of manifold voices and different modes of discourse, which are not merely verbal, but are also considered a social phenomenon, thus regarding discourse as the main component of a narrative work.⁵⁸ Another important tenet within New Historicism, which critic Louis Montrose points out, is that there is a reciprocal interest in the historicity of texts and the textuality of history, thus arguing that the boundaries that discriminate literary and non-literary texts are ultimately a construct and that it is fallacious to perceive the text as an autonomous entity with fixed meanings.⁵⁹ Accordingly, throughout this thesis, literary texts will be endowed with the same status as biographical documents, personal papers, letters, and autobiographical writings.

Given this context, through a biographical approach to the literary works of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, this thesis aims to identify parallel symbolic transitions in the lives of the authors as reflected in their literary fictions which eventually gave way to different modalities of aging as a result of their individual circumstances, but also as

⁵⁴ Louis McNay. *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999): 242.

⁵⁶ M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1999): 242.

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. [Trans. Denis Savage] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

⁵⁸ Tzvetan Todorov. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁵⁹ H. Aram Veesser. Ed. *The New Historicism*. (New York: Routledge, 1989).

symptomatic of their different realities and respective cultures. From the perspective of aging studies, through the comparative analysis of literary texts, but also autobiographical writings, letters, and personal documents, this thesis will approach the discourse of aging exemplified by Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, focusing on similarities and differences in the ways of perceiving aging on behalf of both authors. Likewise, as a contribution to transatlantic literary studies, this comparative study will also tackle issues related to cultural identities in the nineteenth-century, as focused on Bulwer-Lytton and Poe in their role as authors. Finally, this thesis also aims at drawing attention to Bulwer-Lytton's fiction in literary studies through the influence that he exerted on Poe, and resurrect Bulwer-Lytton's literary legacy to awaken the interest of contemporary critics of Victorian literature in the literary fictions of this Victorian writer.

The selection of the literary works of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe that are analysed in the different chapters of this thesis has been made on a tripartite basis, insofar as the literary works on which this study is based evince the significant intertextuality existing in the fictions of both writers at different stages in terms of themes, plots, and characters. These selected works are representative of the manifold genres comprising the literary production of both authors, and they are also evocative of symbolic turning-points that the writers went through at the time and that conditioned their respective processes of aging. Likewise, this thesis is divided into seven chapters, and each of them addresses a comparative analysis of a novel of Bulwer-Lytton and short-story of Poe pertaining to a particular genre and belonging to a specific stage in their life-course, following a chronological order. In the first chapter, a comparative analysis of the significant intertextual links existing between Bulwer-Lytton's early novella *Falkland* and Poe's early tale "The Assignment," through the presence of different tenets pertaining to the tradition of courtly love and the influence of Byronism on both authors, ultimately underscores the homage they paid to their parental background, their idealised memories of the premature death of their first loves, their concern about the haunting ghost of illegitimacy in the marriage of their parents, and their response upon having been appointed as successors of their respective families at an early age, which

would ultimately compel them to gain awareness of their unleashing process of aging and to force them to bid farewell to their ideals of youth. In the second chapter, the parallel analysis of Bulwer-Lytton's silver-fork novel *Pelham* and Poe's satirical tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" brings to the fore the time spent abroad by the authors in foreign societies and their period of socialising, which would lead them to court different female socialites and to meet their prospective wives, leading them to gain insight into the socially-constructed quality of aging. In the third chapter, the identification of the intertextual parallelisms between Bulwer-Lytton's Newgate novel *Paul Clifford* and Poe's crime tale "The Man of the Crowd" underpins symbolic transitions in the lives of the authors, such as their growing estrangement from their respective families and their psychological process of individuation, which would lead them to gain insight into their own individual identities as adults. Their increasing awareness as public figures, given their growing popularity as writers and their acquisition of the role of the father figure in its absence, would lead the authors to explore legal and ethical issues such as legitimacy, blame, and expiation, which will be discussed in chapter four through the analysis of the intertextualities between Bulwer-Lytton's crime novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man." In the fifth chapter, the intertextual interpretation of Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* and Poe's seminal tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" underpins what arises as the most pivotal symbolic transition in the lives of both authors, which is the debacle of Bulwer-Lytton's marriage to his wife Rosina, and Poe's sanctioned exclusion from the Allan household, which, as reflected in these fictions through the differing outcome of their respective plots, would strongly condition the contrasting ways in which the authors would approach their process of aging from then onwards. The subsequent domestic fictions of the authors, as exemplified by Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Caxtons* and Poe's tale "The Black Cat," display a bright and dark picture of life in domesticity respectively, thus showing the differing response of both authors to the effect that their domestic lives, had especially in the perception of their masculinities in the course of their aging. Finally, an analysis of the intertextual links prevailing in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story* and Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M.

Valdemar,” insofar as they address medical and religious issues, underscores the tragic experiences that the authors underwent upon taking care of their diseased relatives until their premature deaths, as Bulwer-Lytton attended to his daughter and his mother, while Poe witnessed the decline in health and eventual demise of his young wife Virginia. Moreover, the comparative interpretation of these two late fictions in the literary careers as well as in the lives of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe also underlines the growing concern of the authors about their precarious health at this stage and their differing approach towards aging in the late years of their lives.



Figure 1 - Edward Bulwer-Lytton in a portrait by Henry William Pickersgill, exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Chapter One

Farewell to the Ideals of Youth: Courtly Love and Byronism in *Falkland* and “The Assignation”

Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe published their respective early fictions, *Falkland* (1827) and “The Assignation” (1834), when they were in their mid-twenties, and both Bulwer-Lytton’s first novella and Poe’s early tale present remarkable intertextual links around the illicit relationship of two lovers who eventually meet a tragic end as a result of their infidelity. The illegitimate liaison depicted in both texts reveals important parallelisms with tenets pertaining to courtly love in the medieval chivalric romance, which Francis Newman defines as the experience between erotic desire and spiritual attainment, as well as a romantic bond that is described through oxymoronic terms, such as “love at once illicit and morally elevating, passionate and disciplined, humiliating and exalting, human and transcendent.”¹ In a similar way, C.S. Lewis also considers courtly love as a specialised sort of romantic affection, which is characterised as humble and courteous, but in which adultery also plays a major role.² Taking into consideration these features, especially the central role attached to unfaithfulness, it can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton’s novella and Poe’s tale, as fictions pertaining to the stage of youth of the authors, present remarkable similarities with the plots of chivalric romances and medieval narratives of courtly love.

In Victorian times, there was a turn for medieval revivalism, which became noticeable in the poems and the artistic manifestations of the time, as is the case with the literary works of Alfred Lord Tennyson and William Morris, as well as the paintings

¹ Francis X. Newman. *The Meaning of Courtly Love*. (Albany: State University of New York, 1968): vii.

² C.S. Lewis. *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936): 2.

of artists belonging to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, such as John Everett Millais and John William Waterhouse, which often dwelled upon scenes pertaining to the tradition of courtly love. As interpreted by the medievalist critic Gaston Paris in the nineteenth-century, courtly love ultimately aimed at underlining the lover's progress and growth in goodness, merit, and worth,³ and consequently, the aging process of the protagonist played a prominent role in the development of the plot in narratives pertaining to the genre. In the origins of chivalric romances of courtly love, the quality of nobility was eminently based on features such as decent character and dignified actions rather than on wealth and family ancestry, and in this sense, it became especially appealing to knights, who envisioned courtly love as a way to advance and move upwards in society. Likewise, within the genre of courtly love, medieval poets adopted the terminology of feudalism, declaring themselves the vassals of the lady, who was usually the wife of their lord, and thus, of a higher social status in comparison with themselves. Similarly, since, at the time, marriage had little to do with any romantic feeling, courtly love was also perceived as a way for nobles to express the affection they could not possibly find in their own marriage. In this respect, courtly love, despite its illicit nature, was also depicted as morally elevating and an experience of special transcendence, considered as an act of initiation, since individuals had to face a dilemma, and accordingly, make a choice the result of which would have an important impact on the remainder of their lives.

Most of these tenets pertaining to courtly love and chivalric romance are presented in Bulwer-Lytton's novella *Falkland* and Poe's tale "The Assignment," especially inasmuch as both fictions depict the love of a knight for a woman, whom he idealises, while the couple has to face the threatening presence of the figure of the husband and the ensuing effect of their guilt as a result their illicit relationship. Bulwer-Lytton's epistolary novella, *Falkland*, presents a compilation of letters depicting the adulterous relationship between Erasmus Falkland and Lady Emily Mandeville, which comprises Falkland's epistles addressed to Emily and his close friend Frederick

³ The medievalist critic Gaston Paris coined the term 'courtly love' (*'l'amour courtois'*) for the first time in an article published in the journal *Romania* in the year 1883.

Monkton, as well as Emily's letters to her husband, John Mandeville, and her lover Falkland. Likewise, Poe's tale, "The Assignation," is set in Venice and tells of how a stranger saves the Marchesa di Mentoni's child from drowning, while her husband witnesses the event without intervening, implying that he knows about the adulterous relationship that has been taking place between his wife and the stranger who has saved the child from death. Both texts thus revolve around an illicit relationship, and by extension, underline the individual's dilemma whether to succumb to that illicitness and suffer the consequences derived from that choice. Presenting a marked resemblance with the tenets of courtly love, these two early works, revolving around the individual's confrontation with adultery, also underline important biographical details in relation to both authors and their parental background. With special relevance to aging, these two literary works portray young heroes that hold on to their ideals, emulating male models of chivalry, and through courtly love, they engage in a process of idealisation of a woman that they consider unapproachable, precisely owing to her condition as a married woman, even though their final surrender to illicit love unleashes an ongoing process of aging for the two lovers.

In this respect, the topic of courtly love will be taken as a metaphor in the analysis of both fictions to underline the farewell to the ideals of youth of the heroes, and by extension, of the authors themselves, since, the figures of Falkland and of the Byronic stranger, and the development of the plot of these early fictions, become symptomatic of the reflections on aging on behalf of their respective authors. The main characters of these fictions are characterised as significantly precocious in spite of their outstanding young age, preferring the isolation of their abodes and the pursuit of knowledge, and holding on to their ideals of greatness rather than succumbing to reality, in clear resemblance with the ideals of the authors at an early stage in life. Likewise, the important influence that the English poet Lord Byron exerted on both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe at an early period of their literary career also comes to the fore in these fictions, and the discontinuous attitude that both authors would take towards the English bard will also shed light on the way they approached their process of maturation as young writers. Likewise, through the characterisation of their respective literary heroes,

Falkland and the Byronic stranger, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe bore in mind symbolic models of male chivalry to which they had been exposed since their early years, as personified by a series of metaphorical father figures that exerted a deep influence on the authors both as writers as well as individuals. Similarly, in the portrayal of the heroines, Emily and the Marchesa di Mentoni, the authors also had in mind their mother figures, inasmuch as both authors had known about the ludicrous situation that their mothers had to face with respect to their husbands in the course of their marriages. In the portrayal of their heroines, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe also took into consideration a tragic turning-point that would mark their youth and would also unleash their process of aging, as is the idealised figure of their first love – the personification of the lady of chivalric romances – and her eventual tragic death, which would have a deep effect on them and would mark the farewell to their youth. Likewise, aware of the haunting incidence of the topic of adultery – ever present in the chivalric romances of courtly love, also in their parental background – Bulwer-Lytton and Poe would take it as a central issue in the plot of their early fictions *Falkland* and “The Assignment,” a topic which contributes to unleashing the process of aging of both the hero and the heroine, to abandonment of their ideals, providing awareness of their deeds, and giving insight into their tragic and metaphorical awakening into reality.

Literary endeavours, idealism, and fate

In an early essay published in his volume *The Student: A Series of Papers* (1835), Bulwer-Lytton displays his views with regard to the relationship that can be established between an author’s life and his respective writings:

In the mind of a man there is always a resemblance to his works. His heroes may not be like himself, but there are certain qualities which belong to him. The sentiments he utters are his at the moment: if you find them predominate in all his works, they predominate in his mind; if they are advanced in one, but contradicted in another, they still resemble their authors, and betray the want of

depth or of resolution in his mind. His works alone make not up a man's character, but they are the index of that living book.⁴

In the passage above, Bulwer-Lytton thus claims that an author's writings ultimately reveal important aspects of his personal life, and in this respect, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton's early novella *Falkland* and the isolated existence of its protagonist bear a close resemblance to Bulwer-Lytton himself in the early stages of his life. In Bulwer-Lytton's epistolary novella, Erasmus Falkland confesses to his friend Frederick Monkton that he takes delight in the isolated existence he leads on his own, detached from any social gaieties, relapsing into himself, and acquiring the habit of deep reflection. In contrast, in his letters, Frederick Monkton provides Falkland with accurate depictions of the fashionable gatherings of the season, at which Monkton is a frequent guest. It is thus implied that Falkland's estrangement from the world and his perpetual seclusion in the manor house of his family have rendered him aged in spite of his obvious youth. In point of fact, in analogy with his fictional character, Bulwer-Lytton also led a rather secluded and lonely childhood, since, estranged from his father, mostly due to the latter's jealous nature, he established a special bond with his mother Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, whose influence would prove determinant throughout his life. Likewise, his two elder brothers, William and Henry, were also to abandon the family stately home fairly soon, thus leaving the youngest sibling to grow up on his own. The eldest brother, William, was elected heir to his father's estate, thereby ultimately owning Heydon Hall, General Bulwer's family estate in Norfolk, while the second sibling, Henry, was to inherit the fortune of his maternal grandmother, and he was also soon gone from his mother's side. Hence, Elizabeth Barbara naturally welcomed the birth of her third child, who, by nature, was particularly weak and fragile, and who was to remain with her in the family stately home, Knebworth House. Nonetheless, her devotion to her youngest child, as he was her favourite, soon gave way to her husband's resentment, especially when he realised that his wife had selected him as her own heir and prospective inheritor of Knebworth.

⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "On the Difference between Authors and the Impression Conveyed of Them by Their Works." (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 8.

In resemblance with the way Monkton portrays his friend's gloomy isolation in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, the narrator in Poe's "The Assignment" also rejoices in the visualisation of a mysterious man in the streets of Venice, whom he perceives to be estranged from the rest and describes him as "a figure, muffled in a cloak,"⁵ secluded in a richly-furnished palazzo, and spending his days in the contemplation of classical works of art, almost detached from earthly existence. When Poe was twenty years of age, he alluded to the sense of aloofness and estrangement that had characterised his childhood in his early poem "Alone" (1829), which was never published during his lifetime. In his poem, Poe stated that "from childhood's hour I have not been / as others were – I have not seen / as others saw,"⁶ thus emphasising the uniqueness and difference that had often detached him from his peers. At an early age, Poe had to bear his biological father's likely abandonment of the family and the premature death of his biological mother, and as a result of these tragic circumstances, he was soon separated from his siblings; his elder brother, William Henry Leonard, was sent to Baltimore to live with his paternal grandparents, while his young sister, Rosalie, was adopted by William and Jane Scott Mackenzie in Richmond. Owing to Frances Allan's close acquaintance with the actress Elizabeth Poe, Poe was soon adopted by the Allans, who were a wealthy family from Richmond that would grant him a good education and the lifestyle of a Southern gentleman. Nevertheless, even though Poe became particularly devoted to his foster mother Frances Allan, his relationship with his foster father, John Allan, would ever remain troublesome for all his life.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novella, the demise of Falkland's first love prompts his reluctance to take part in social gatherings and live for the present, choosing instead to lead an alternative existence on his own. Falkland's seclusion in his family's manor house, the abode where he spent his childhood, quickens his own process of aging, and

⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assignment)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 154.

⁶ The manuscript of Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Alone" is dated 1829, and it was first published in *Scribner's Monthly Magazine* in September 1875. See Edgar Allan Poe's "Alone." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. I: Poems*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969): 146.

forces him to confess that, despite his young adulthood, he has acquired many habits pertaining to the aged, thus unveiling his outstanding precociousness as a young man. Disappointed with any kind of earthly existence after suffering acute grief and melancholy, he has acquired a meditative nature, dismissing a youth of passion in favour of the experience of the mind, and it is at this stage that Falkland realises his existence bears a close resemblance with Charles Robert Maturin's character, Melmoth,⁷ thus confessing he "passed at once, like Melmoth, from youth to age."⁸ Falkland often compares himself with literary figures such as Melmoth and Doctor Faustus precisely owing to his constant pursuit of wisdom and his eagerness to abandon any youthful pleasures and attain adulthood before due course, thus contributing to quickening his own process of aging.⁹ The death of the first woman he has ever loved compels him to apply himself to the study and the pursuit of wisdom in earnest, which requires that he indulges in a life of seclusion, ignoring the present and devoting his entire existence to the acquisition of knowledge and to indulging in memories from the past. However, his voluntary isolation and his intention to emulate Faustus ultimately leads him to misery, as he gains insight into the loneliness of his own existence, and acknowledges the first symptoms of aging, thus confessing:

All knowledge brings us disappointment, and this knowledge the most – the satiety of good, the suspicion of evil, the decay of our young dreams, the premature iciness of age, the reckless, aimless, joyless indifference which follows an overwrought and feverish excitation – These constitute the lot of men who have renounced *hope* in the acquisition of *thought*.¹⁰

⁷ Charles Maturin – Irish playwright, novelist, and clergyman – published the gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820. The character of Melmoth is a scholar who decides to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for one hundred and fifty extra years of life, and is then compelled to look for somebody who will take over the pact for him.

⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 20.

⁹ Faust, main character of a German classic legend, is a scholar, who, dissatisfied with life, makes a pact with the devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures. The basic plot of this German legend has been reinterpreted through outstanding literary adaptations, such as Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (c. 1604), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1808 and 1832), Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1928-1940), and Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde* (1947).

¹⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 29.

Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton would spend most of his lonely childhood in Knebworth House, moving, to use Robert Lytton's words, from being "the object of his father's indifference to one of positive dislike."¹¹ Furthermore, as General Bulwer would pass away when his youngest son was only four years of age, Bulwer-Lytton eventually remained in the sole company of his mother. This isolated upbringing and the grandeur attached to the Knebworth estate significantly paved the way for Bulwer-Lytton's lifetime attraction towards intellectual endeavours, and in particular, literary creativity. In Bulwer-Lytton's autobiographical accounts, which his son Robert refers to in the biography he wrote of his father, the author contends that he was incapable of remembering a time when he was not familiar with reading, but conversely, he distinctly recalls how he was initiated into writing. His mother played an important part in nourishing Bulwer-Lytton's inventive vein, as she was fond of reciting literary passages that she had long committed to her memory, and the first lines that ever came to Bulwer-Lytton's mind were mostly an imitation of his mother's recitations. In this way, he found out that he could compose even before learning to write, since, at six years of age, he created his first love poem addressed to a girl two years his senior, who was to become known as Miss Rose T. As evidence of the importance that Bulwer-Lytton would attach to this early event in his life, he explicitly referred to it in his autobiography, which was never published on its own, but was included and overtly quoted in the biography of his father that his son, Robert, would publish. As stated in this autobiographical account, it was Bulwer-Lytton's mother who transcribed her son's poem carefully, and sent it to the intended addressee, who greatly complimented its author's early creative gifts, and hence, it was by means of this early creation that Bulwer-Lytton would first find the acceptance and stimulation he needed to pursue his literary vein and propel his long and prolific literary career.

With regard to Poe, as the adopted son of a wealthy merchant from Virginia, he was granted the privilege of a European education and of living in a stately home, Moldavia, which John Allan had inherited from his uncle William Galt, who, according

¹¹ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 77.

to biographer Kenneth Silverman, was presumed to be “the wealthiest man in Virginia.”¹² Clever and successful in business, John Allan’s exacting manner found its counterpart in his praise for intellectual achievement, which he inculcated in Poe from early childhood. As Kenneth Silverman claims, John Allan would often quote passages from authors such as Miguel de Cervantes, Jonathan Swift, and William Shakespeare, envying their literary ability and their talent for writing, and hence, John Allan’s praise for literary achievement exerted an important influence on Poe’s curiosity at an early age. Likewise, during his schooling in Richmond, Poe displayed a notable gift for language, reading classical authors such as Horace and Cicero at the age of thirteen, and disclosing an outstanding precociousness for poetry, often showing his comrades at school the results of his prolific creativity. In fact, Poe’s schoolmaster Joseph Clarke in Richmond declared that, at that time, his pupil had written enough poems to make a whole volume. In spite of his youth, Poe expressed his intention to have them published, but Clarke advised John Allan to disallow the publication, because he thought that being the author of a printed book at such a young age would necessarily exert a negative effect on Poe. However, in defiance of any recommendation, in the year 1827, when Poe was merely eighteen years of age, his first collection of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*,¹³ came into being anonymously, arguably because Poe wanted to avoid his foster father getting to know about its publication. Poe’s first collection of poems mostly revolved around his childhood and youth, underlining its author’s outstanding precociousness, as, in the preface to the volume, Poe stated that he had composed most of its poems when he was not even fourteen years of age. According to Kenneth Silverman, Poe’s early collection of poems underscores a portrait of the artist as a young man, thus taking for granted that many of the collected poems somehow reflected Poe’s own personal situation at the time.¹⁴ As a case in point, the poem that gives the collection its title, “Tamerlane,” features an orphan of unknown parents who strives to

¹² Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 27.

¹³ Edgar Allan Poe. *Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian*. (Boston: Calvin F.S. Thomas, 1827).

¹⁴ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 39.

attain status and success on the grounds of his genius and ambition. Poe was thus well aware of his gift as an artist and his remarkable maturity for someone of such a young age. In this sense, James Galt, William Galt's adopted son and close friend of Poe's in childhood, stated that Poe was "fully imbued in his early youth with an idea that he would one day become a great writer."¹⁵

Similar to the awakening and self-realisation of Poe's creative faculties, in the case of Bulwer-Lytton, in addition to his mother, it was his maternal grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton, who also exerted a deep influence on Bulwer-Lytton's early fondness for learning and writing. His grandfather was a highly-esteemed scholar and a man of extraordinary learning, and, regardless of his wealth, he despised fame and ostentation, and instead, he devoted most of his life to the pursuit of knowledge. Being shy by nature, and tormented by an unsuited marriage, he gladly disentangled himself from the world to dedicate his life to study. In the absence of his father, Bulwer-Lytton would naturally look to his grandfather as an alternative paternal figure. Nonetheless, Richard Warburton Lytton's sudden death, due to an apoplectic seizure, when Bulwer-Lytton was eight years of age, caused a deep impression on the young boy and led to what he would recall years later in his autobiography as the "great event of his infant life,"¹⁶ which took place when Bulwer-Lytton inherited his grandfather's library. Bulwer-Lytton would consider this event especially transcendental, as it involved his actual acquaintance with literary classics, and he would significantly establish a parallelism between this discovery and the passion often ascribed to an illicit romantic infatuation, thus stating:

Books I had known familiarly before; but they had been given me with reserve – taken, one by one at a time, from mahogany cases under lock and key, with cautions not to dog-ear, and an infinity of troublesome restrictions. But here I was a chartered libertine. I might throw the handkerchief as I liked. I was not married to a single volume, in a humdrum-monogynical connection. I was

¹⁵ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 39.

¹⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 104.

Solomon in all his glory, and surrounded by all his seraglio. Those Greek, and Hebrew, and Oriental, Beauties! I lifted up their veils.¹⁷

Given the fact his mother was often absent from Knebworth to attend legal duties associated with her father's recent demise, Bulwer-Lytton was allowed to indulge in the perusal of his grandfather's books for days on end. The habit of reading as well as the introspection he acquired in his early infancy continued until the very last days of his life. The illicitness to which the character of Falkland finally succumbs in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, as well as his interest in the pursuit of knowledge, thus echo the feeling of illicitness that also befell the author himself upon reading the books from his grandfather's library.

Hence, in analogy with Falkland, Bulwer-Lytton also led his youth detached from others and in the willing pursuit of knowledge. His mother Elizabeth Barbara would soon notice her son's precociousness and avid fondness for learning, causing her to consider sending him to school at an early age. Nevertheless, Bulwer-Lytton's own account of his life at school was not particularly positive, as he often suffered from homesickness, which caused a severe deterioration in his health. Having attended different schools during his infancy, when he reached the early years of adolescence, it was agreed that he would remain home to be instructed by a private tutor as this would better suit his sedentary habits and precarious health. In his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton described this stage in his life in the following terms: "being older in mind and appearance than my years, I considered myself too much of a man to go to any school whatever."¹⁸ He both felt and looked older than he actually was, due primarily to his precociousness and high intelligence as a schoolboy, but also because of his isolated upbringing, which endowed him with an introspective nature and even an unusual interest in metaphysical studies for someone of his age.

¹⁷ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 105.

¹⁸ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 126.

Among his grandfather's books, Bulwer-Lytton seemed particularly fascinated by Johann Gottlieb Fichte's metaphysical theories¹⁹ to the extent that, when he was just eight years old, he is said to have questioned his own mother about whether she sometimes felt overcome by the sense of her own identity.²⁰ Fichte's idealist theories defined consciousness as an interaction between the ego – the 'I' – and otherness – the 'not-I' – thus identifying one's own sense of identity and individuality in relation with the presence of others. According to Fichte, consciousness of 'the self' depends on resistance by something that is understood as not part of 'the self,' and accordingly, mutual recognition of rational individuals turns out to be a required condition for the individual 'I,' since a necessary condition for self-awareness is the existence of other rational subjects. In this respect, according to Allan Conrad Christensen, Bulwer-Lytton's early novella addresses the epistemological opposition between a world within and a world without, as exemplified by the different approaches of the hero, Falkland, and the heroine, Emily.²¹ As Christensen further argues, Bulwer-Lytton's idealism claimed that all knowledge was a form of self-knowledge, even arguing that the world is ultimately a lie, and there is nothing true in the universe except one's own mind.

As Dawn Sova acknowledges, like Bulwer-Lytton, Poe also became interested in the philosophical precepts of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and he actually mentions this German philosopher in an important number of his tales, thus showing the influence that his theories exerted on his writings.²² In this respect, in his work *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797), the idealist philosopher Fichte refers to the necessity of fostering relationships with other rational beings in order to achieve consciousness, as these

¹⁹ Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) was a German philosopher and one of the founding figures of the philosophical movement known as German idealism, which was grounded on the writings of Immanuel Kant. Fichte is considered to have bridged the gap existing between Kant and the German idealist philosopher Friedrich Hegel. Fichte has been highly regarded owing to his insight into the nature of self-consciousness and self-awareness. In his book *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797), Fichte claims that self-consciousness was a social phenomenon.

²⁰ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 107.

²¹ According to Allan Conrad Christensen, Bulwer-Lytton alludes in this way to his idealist theory in a letter addressed to Mrs. Cunningham, dated 1828. See Allan Conrad Christensen's *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 26.

²² Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work.* (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 88.

others draw the subject out of his unconsciousness and into an awareness of ‘the self’ as a free individual. As an idealist, Fichte also propounded that reality is fundamentally mental, and thus, it is mentally constructed, so that, complying with Kant, it can be assumed that “we can never be certain whether all of our putative outer experience is mere imagining.”²³ These idealist precepts would pave the ground for Poe’s idealism, which he explicitly states in his early tale “The Assigination” through the idealised love between the Byronic stranger and the Marchesa di Mentoni and the final resolution of the story. Nonetheless, inasmuch as Fichte also claims that self-awareness requires the presence of others, Poe also gained insight into the social expectations that his foster father bestowed upon him, and this would also influence his sense of identity with regard to others and, as will be shown, the attitude that he perceived that he was socially required to take towards aging at this stage of his life.

From an early age, Bulwer-Lytton became interested in the relation established between man and the transcendent, and the role that the individual had to play in the universe, since, having been chosen as prospective heir to the Lytton lineage from early infancy, Bulwer-Lytton was compelled to gain insight into his own identity and the expectations that had been placed on him on his behalf, aware that his fate had been somehow predestined from the moment his mother chose him to be her heir. With respect to Poe, he was arguably the most fortunate of the three Poe siblings, as, living with the Allan family, he was well provided with comfort and economic security. John Allan, would soon begin to fulfil his promise to educate his foster son, and by the time he was five years of age, Poe was sent to a teacher, who was closely acquainted with the Allans, Clotilda Fisher, and then, to a Richmond schoolmaster, William Ewing, who reported frequently on the young boy’s notable progress. Subsequently, when Poe turned six years of age, the Allans took him with them to England, where he was first sent to the Dubourg school in Chelsea, living three miles away from the rented flat of the Allans. Then, when he turned eight, Poe went to a school at Stoke Newington under the management of the Reverend John Bransby. According to biographer Kenneth

²³ Immanuel Kant. *Notes and Fragments*. (Paul Guyer. Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 318.

Silverman, even though John Allan thought the days spent by his foster son at school would be rewarding, Poe would always remember them as particularly lonely and unhappy,²⁴ as he progressively grew more introspective in an unfamiliar environment. During the period of his schooldays in Stoke Newington, detached from his foster family and having to make choices on his own but in the company of others, for the first time Poe became personally acquainted with identity issues that would exert an important influence on his process of aging.

As Kenneth Silverman points out,²⁵ if, in William Galt's words, Poe coveted the idea that one day he was to become great, both in his childhood and in his youth Bulwer-Lytton was also prophesied the eminence of his future, and years later, he was to recall two experiences in his autobiography, acknowledging that, on both occasions, the prophecies proved accurate enough and exerted a deep influence on him. When Bulwer-Lytton was still a child and his nurse held him in her arms, a stranger approached them and claimed that the child was bound to become someone remarkable and even greater than his father had been. This stranger was ultimately found to be a madman who had escaped from his keeper, but similarly, years later, in his youth, Bulwer-Lytton was approached by a gipsy girl who also prophesied his future. In his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton recollected her words in this way:

You have known sorrows already. You lost your father when you were young. You have brothers, but no sister. Ah! You have had a sweetheart when you were a mere boy. You will never see her again, never. The line is clean broken off. It cut you to the heart. You nearly died of it. You have conquered, but you'll never be as gay again. [...] Still, you are a prosperous gentleman; you will never come to want; you will be much before the world and raise your head high, but I fear you'll not have the honours you count on now. [...] Your best friends and your worst enemies will be women. You'll hunger for love all your life, and you will have much of it; but less satisfaction than sorrow.²⁶

²⁴ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 18.

²⁵ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 39.

²⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 315-316.

These two prophecies determined Bulwer-Lytton's future to an important extent, as he himself acknowledged that these prophetic words stirred his self-esteem and moved him into action so as to fulfil the fate that seemed predestined to him. Conversely, if Bulwer-Lytton gladly accepted the duty that fate had bestowed upon him as future successor of the Lyttons when his mother chose him to be her heir, in the course of time, Poe would regard the fact of having been adopted by the Allans as an unfortunate twist of fate that he would learn to regret later in life.

Lord Byron's long shadow upon the authors and their literary characters

Poe's flirtation with poetry envisioned as something forbidden bears some resemblance to the parallelism between reading and illicit relationships that Bulwer-Lytton also appeared to establish at such a young age. However, if Bulwer-Lytton's interaction with books was taken as a sign of precociousness in a boy of such tender years, Poe's particular taste in the field of poetry was often a cause for concern in the Allan household. In fact, from his foster father's perspective, Poe's liking for the poetry of Lord Byron was recognised for the most part as a sign of his immaturity. John Allan praised the values of edifying literature, which he considered particularly suitable to enrich the mind, but conversely, he showed his disapproval of the passion-filled Byronic cult of the time, which he necessarily equated with the fantasies of youth and adolescence, which, according to John Allan, Poe seemed particularly fond of. In this respect, John Allan thought Poe's taste for Byron was mostly to blame for his foster son's lack of maturity and seemingly reckless behaviour. In fact, Poe's apparent immaturity has been discussed on different occasions, as James Gargano's article asserts.²⁷ Nonetheless, according to Kenneth Silverman, Poe would create this portrait

²⁷ In his essay "Henry James and the Question of Poe's Maturity," James Gargano refers to highly-reputed writers such as Henry James, Paul Elmer More, and T.S. Eliot, who stigmatised Poe on account of his alleged immaturity. In this respect, Henry James stated that "an enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection," Paul Elmer More referred to Poe as "the poet of unripe boys and unsound men," and T.S. Eliot argued that Poe had "the intellect of a highly gifted young person before puberty." Gargano reaches the conclusion that these writers had this opinion of Poe because, as opposed to Henry James, who imported terror into drawing rooms and well-mannered country gardens, Edgar Allan Poe rather invented a fictional world which reflected the ultimate mystery of transcendent reality in its enigmatic manifestations. See James Gargano's "Henry James and the Question of Poe's Maturity" in

of himself in youth from the romantic pessimism that characterised the works of Lord Byron, often depicting himself as moody and lonely, thus imitating the Byronic figure which became so fashionable at the time. In this sense, Poe's collection of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, presents many echoes of verse in Lord Byron's works, even if these poems also reveal an acute preoccupation with the afterlife and the denial of death, which were to characterise much of Poe's later fiction, but also attracted his attention in his youth.

In Kenneth Silverman's view, Poe's concern about death at such an early age responds to his inability to mourn the death of his mother, Elizabeth,²⁸ since neither John Allan nor his wife Frances could quite replace Poe's own image of his departed biological mother, and as a child, Poe denied the permanence of her loss because he was still incapable of understanding the finality involved in death. This led him to remain in a state of immaturity, refusing to grow old and attain adulthood, thus willing himself to extend the period of his youth, which would mostly draw him closer to the memories of his departed parent, especially when his relation with the Allans began to deteriorate. In this sense, in his poem "Dreams" (1827), the young poet exclaims: "Oh! That my young life were a lasting dream / [...] Yes! Though that long dream were of hopeless sorrow, / 'Twere better than the cold reality / Of waking life."²⁹ The poet thus equates youth with a dream, and conversely, he identifies his adult life with the dull process whereby he is compelled to awake into the reality of adulthood, thereby turning into a kind of Peter Pan figure.³⁰ In this respect, Poe would mostly hold on to idealism and a pervasive cult

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV's *Poe and His Times: The Artist and His Milieu* (Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1990): 247-255.

²⁸ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 77.

²⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. *Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian*. (Boston: Calvin F.S., 1827): 26, lines 1, 4-6.

³⁰ Peter Pan is the eponymous character created by the Scottish novelist and playwright J.M. Barrie and is characterised as a mischievous boy who can fly and never grows up, spending his never-ending childhood on the island of Neverland as the leader of his gang, the Lost Boys. Barrie's play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, premiered in 1904 in London, and became highly popular, running to 1913. In Victorian England, where children were almost treated as adults, Peter Pan became an icon inasmuch as he represented a genuine spirit of childhood and youth. In 1983, American psychologist Dan Kiley coined the 'Peter Pan syndrome' (*puer aeternus*) in his book *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up* (1983) to refer to individuals, usually male, with underdeveloped maturity.

of youth that prevailed at the time, especially through Romantic tenets. Conversely, though, John Allan would stand by his foster son, as a constant reminder of reality, and thus, of his need to ‘grow up,’ since John Allan almost forced Poe to work as a clerk in his business and often reprimanded him for his irresponsible behaviour and profligate habits. The publication of his first collection of poetry – *Tamerlane and Other Poems* – when he was eighteen years of age tackled Poe’s unwilling farewell to his boyhood, and apparently, to his flirtation with the Byronic cult he had so fervently revered up to then. The change that befell Poe at the time can be perceived through his desire to pretend that he was older than he really was. This became particularly noticeable when, on deciding to join the army, he consciously lied about his age, and in this respect, biographer Peter Ackroyd narrates this enlightening episode with regard to Poe’s perception of his process of aging in this way:

He gave his age as twenty-two, rather than the actual eighteen. Minors were accepted into the Army, so there was no practical reason for him to lie: he just wanted to disappear, and to lose the burden of his identity.³¹

Likewise, in a letter addressed to John Allan, Poe reassured he had “long given up Byron as a model,”³² thus emphasising his desire to leave behind that stage in his life. In this regard, it can be argued that Poe underwent an irregular process of aging, or rather he subverted any conventionally-established phases of aging, sometimes showing signs of precociousness and of growing aged fast in spite of his youth, or else, conversely, behaving childishly in the years of his adulthood and even in the last years of his life.

As suggestive of his precociousness, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Falkland spends his young adulthood in an ancient abode, “a ruin rather than a house,”³³ refurbished with large bookcases, exotic decoration and a gloomy atmosphere. Nonetheless, his will to renounce any contact with the outside world, as well as any social gaieties, renders him an outcast, rejecting action and taking pleasure in reflection instead, thus growing aged

³¹ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 28-29.

³² Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to John Allan.” Baltimore, 29th May 1829. A photographic facsimile of this letter was published in Mary Newton Stanard’s *Edgar Allan Poe Letters Till Now Unpublished in the Valentine Museum*, Richmond, Virginia, and Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1925. 137. This letter can be consulted at the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Virginia.

³³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 11.

before due course. Falkland's mansion not only stands for his abode but it also acquires a special transcendence as it allows him to relapse into the past and indulge in reveries due to his thoughtful and visionary nature, describing himself as "Prospero in his desert island."³⁴ Falkland thus lives in a world of his own, indulging in reveries and dreams which detach him from reality and everyday existence, thus also holding on to idealism.

In Poe's tale, "The Assignation," which was at first aptly entitled "The Visionary," the narrator confesses he believes the vision of the stranger to be a daydream, as it is argued that the man resides in "the cold valley and shadow"³⁵ after dying in the prime of his youth. The stranger's passionate existence and his ardent desire to live eventually cut his own life short, bringing about an untimely death. The narrator also refers to the stranger claiming he had "fallen in the flames of thine own youth,"³⁶ thereby highlighting the contention that it was his passionate nature and profligate manners which were responsible for his dying before his time. Along the same lines, the narrator also places emphasis on the stranger's imagination and powers of meditation, arguing that nobody should blame him for his visionary nature, as the narrator himself acknowledges his belief in other worlds beyond a merely earthly existence. In this sense, the stranger in Poe's tale admits that "to dream has been the business of my life,"³⁷ thus disclosing his idealist and visionary nature which the narrator of the tale also appears to share. Consequently, Bulwer-Lytton's Falkland and the Byronic stranger in Poe's tale emerge as parallel figures, doomed and tormented despite their apparent youth, concealing a secret deed, in constant pursuit of knowledge, indulging in reveries and living a life of seclusion, detached from the rest of human beings, and metaphorically growing old before due time, as they seem to be young only in appearance.

³⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 30.

³⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assignation)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 151.

³⁶ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assignation)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 150.

³⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assignation)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 165.

The male protagonists of Bulwer-Lytton's novella and Poe's tale – Falkland and the stranger – are also explicitly based on a Byronic male model for whom both authors shared their praise in youth. In Poe's tale, "The Assigination," the narrator feels puzzled when beholding the stranger's countenance as some of his facial traits bring back classical times, in reference to the stranger's features, which he had seen "none more classically regular, except, perhaps, the marble ones of Emperor Commodus."³⁸ Furthermore, despite the stranger's insistence that he has never been to London, the narrator recognises his English origins, arguing that, "the person of whom I speak was not only by birth, but in education, an Englishman."³⁹ The stranger's countenance and his manners are strongly reminiscent of those of Lord Byron, especially when taking into consideration that Poe's tale is set in Venice, where Byron spent an important period of his life. In fact, it was in Venice during 1818 and 1820 that Lord Byron had a relationship with the young Countess Teresa Guiccioli,⁴⁰ whom he even asked to elope with him. In this respect, according to Dawn Sova, "The Assigination" is, indeed, an account of the adulterous affair which took place between the English poet Lord Byron and Countess Teresa Guiccioli, who, as is the case with the Marchesa di Mentoni in Poe's tale, was already married to an older Venetian nobleman.⁴¹ Likewise, in 1816, Byron spent a period of time in Venice, where he had affairs with two married women, Marianna Segati and Margarita Cogni, and the tragic end of the latter, who threw herself

³⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assigination)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 156.

³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assigination)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 164.

⁴⁰ Lord Byron met Teresa Guiccioli in Venice when she was only nineteen years of age and was married to a husband, Count Guiccioli, who was more than forty years her senior. From their first encounter, Byron and Teresa immediately became closely attached to each other, and it is claimed that, from then onwards, Byron never truly cared for another woman. The English poet and the Italian countess frequently met, while, the Count Guiccioli, who apparently admired the English poet, watched them with caution. Byron even dreaded that the Count had hired assassins to kill him, and even though the Count finally carried off his wife from Byron's side, the couple still exchanged ardent letters. Byron and Guiccioli lived together for years until the English poet sailed for Greece.

⁴¹ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 16.

into the Venetian canal when Byron deserted her, clearly brings to mind the initial scene in Poe's tale.

Not only does Poe's tale revolve around actual episodes from Byron's life, but it is also the case with Bulwer-Lytton's first novella, which develops on the same lines, thus creating an important effect of intertextuality between both literary works. In this respect, in terms of their physical appearance, there is also a close parallelism set between Falkland and the Byronic stranger in Poe's tale, especially with regard to their curly hair and their prominent forehead, since, when Falkland attends Lady Margaret's dinner, his features are depicted in the following way:

the melancholy depths of the calm and thoughtful eye, there sat a resolution and a power [...] and his hair, of a light chestnut, fell in large antique curls over his forehead. That forehead, indeed, constituted the principal feature of his countenance.⁴²

In analogy with *Falkland*, in Poe's tale "The Assigination" the narrator's encounter with the stranger in the streets of Venice prompts a description which closely resembles that of the hero in Bulwer-Lytton's novel:

[e]yes, whose shadows varied from pure hazel to intense and brilliant jet – and a profusion of curling, black hair, from which a forehead of unusual breadth gleamed forth at intervals all light and ivory.⁴³

Both descriptions focus on the characters' mournful eyes, their profuse curly hair, and their prominent forehead, which, are, in turn, clearly reminiscent of those of Byron, thus showing both Bulwer-Lytton's and Poe's tribute to the English poet in their respective youth and early writings.

Falkland's passionate nature and ultimate desolation clearly turn him into a Byronic hero, as Falkland presents many of the features usually associated with Byronism such as talent, a distaste for society, high rank and privilege, rebellion, exile, an unsavoury past, love thwarted by social constraints, and, ultimately, a self-

⁴² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 37.

⁴³ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assigination)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 156.

destructive manner. According to Allan Conrad Christensen, Bulwer-Lytton's novella, *Falkland* was the literary product arising from Bulwer-Lytton's stay in Paris in his youth, during the two years preceding its publication, inasmuch as in Paris Bulwer-Lytton's moods alternated between dissoluteness and depression alike, somehow resembling Lord Byron's romantic temperament and the cult to the English bard during that age.⁴⁴ Likewise, in Bulwer-Lytton's biography, his son Robert Lytton declared that Lord Byron was among his father's favourite poets,⁴⁵ even if Bulwer-Lytton's attitude towards Lord Byron remained ambivalent all through his life and changed through his personal aging process. As one of his essays entitled "Lake Lemán" and compiled in the collection *The Student: A Series of Papers* asserts,⁴⁶ Bulwer-Lytton visited Lord Byron's house in Geneva, and imagined how Lord Byron gave free vent to his imagination behind its walls, stating that, "it was here that he was in the ripest maturity of his genius – in the most interesting epoch of his life,"⁴⁷ when he composed *Manfred* (1816-17), and parts of *Childe Harold* (1812-18). Even though Bulwer-Lytton praised Byron, the Victorian writer was also careful to note that Byron was not a poet of passion, as had been commonly observed, but rather a poet of sentiment, thus highlighting the fact that, in his view, Byron truly aimed at mastering the passions through the prevalence of thought or the affectation of the mind. Hence, according to Bulwer-Lytton, Byron mostly kindled thoughts into feelings,⁴⁸ stating that his luxuries were mostly of the intellect, not of passion.⁴⁹ Through Byron's influence, Bulwer-Lytton was in favour of an intellectualised kind of passion in his youth, which also conditioned his way of aging and contributed to his precociousness and detachment in his early youth, which are clearly reflected in the literary character of *Falkland*.

⁴⁴ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 27.

⁴⁵ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 31.

⁴⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Lake Lemán, and Its Associations." *The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 105-124.

⁴⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Lake Lemán, and Its Associations." *The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 106.

⁴⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Lake Lemán, and Its Associations." *The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 113.

⁴⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Lake Lemán, and Its Associations." *The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I*. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 106.

As Bulwer-Lytton states in his essay about Byron, during his visit to Lord Byron's house in Geneva, he also tried to envision how Byron felt at that stage, recalling a passage from the English poet's *Journal of his Swiss Tour* (1816), in which Byron stated that even the splendour of nature was unable to lighten the weight upon his heart. It is by means of this perpetual melancholy that Bulwer-Lytton called Byron a poet of sentiment and intellect, as well as of touching egotism,⁵⁰ which were qualities that he praised mostly in Byron and which led Bulwer-Lytton to identify with him. Eventually, Bulwer-Lytton's identification with Lord Byron reached its zenith when he became closely acquainted with Lady Caroline Lamb, who had been romantically involved with Lord Byron. In his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton declared that he grew mostly interested in her due to her recollections and graphic descriptions of Byron.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the end of his romance with Caroline Lamb, which was turbulent enough, and his following marriage to Rosina Wheeler, eventually ended the Byronic phase in Bulwer-Lytton's life and, as James Campbell claims, Bulwer-Lytton eventually put the "ghost of Byronism"⁵² to rest.

Likewise, in Scott Peeples' view, Poe composed most of his early poetry in an attempt to "create worlds other than the one from which he felt alienated and outcast,"⁵³ and with this in mind, his first volume mainly followed the trace of the English romantic poets, and, in particular, that of Lord Byron. Following his English upbringing and back in the United States, Poe mirrored himself in the English poet, admiring him both for his poetry and his rebelliousness, thus following the Byronic cult that prevailed at the time and that so fervently attracted the youth. Hence, even though when he turned twenty years of age Poe claimed he had long given up Lord Byron as a model, Byron's influence on him lasted for a lifetime. Poe's obsession with Byron in his youth even determined his manner of dress and his rebellious behaviour, but this influence became mostly noticeable in his own writings, since, according to Dawn Sova, some of Poe's

⁵⁰ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 27.

⁵¹ Robert Bulwer-Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 329.

⁵² James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 31.

⁵³ Scott Peeples. *Edgar Allan Poe Revisited*. (London: Prentice Hall, 1998): 1.

characters significantly respond to “veiled examples of the Byronic physiognomy and personality,”⁵⁴ among them particularly, the unnamed stranger in Poe’s tale “The Assignment.” Like Bulwer-Lytton, Poe was most familiar with Lord Byron’s biographical details, as shown through his article entitled “Byron and Miss Chaworth,” published in the *Columbian Magazine* in the year 1844,⁵⁵ which focuses on Lord Byron’s romance with Mary Chaworth.⁵⁶ In his essay, Poe underlines especially that Byron’s passion for her was chiefly of an idealised nature and pervaded many of Byron’s poems and letters all through his life. Lord Byron’s idealisation of women clearly resembles Poe’s own perpetual search for an idealised love, which he would explore in his early works but he would also extend to his last tales. In a lecture delivered on 10th July 1848, in Lowell, Massachusetts, only one year before his demise, Poe recited Lord Byron’s long poem “The Bride of Abydos” (1813) with such vividness that, according to Dawn Sova, Poe’s manner of rendering some selections from Byron’s poems was supremely memorable.⁵⁷ In Byron’s “The Bride of Abydos,” the Turkish ruler, Giaffir, rebukes his alleged son, Salim, who professes his love for his half-sister Zuleika, and taking into consideration the story described in the poem, Poe’s dramatic reading may well have responded to some biographical events in his own life that he had identified in this poetic composition. As happens in the poem, Poe was also rejected by his foster father, John Allan, while, subsequently, Poe would also court and eventually marry his cousin, Virginia Clemm.

Mirroring male models of chivalry and paying tribute to the figure of the mother

In narratives of courtly love and of chivalric romances, knights are initiated through the presence of other knights that they try to emulate and in whom they mirror themselves.

⁵⁴ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 41.

⁵⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. “Byron and Miss Chaworth.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches, 1843-1849*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1120.

⁵⁶ Lord Byron fell in love with Mary Chaworth upon meeting her at school. In his later memoirs, Byron claimed that Mary Chaworth became the first object of his adult sexual feelings. See Fiona MacCarthy’s *Byron: Life and Legend* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).

⁵⁷ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 41.

In like fashion, the presence or absence of male models – mostly symbolic father figures – to follow and imitate would also exert an important influence on both authors and their respective early fictionalised heroes in *Falkland* and “The Assignation.” In this sense, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novella, Falkland mirrors himself in two paternal figures, which are that of his father, and in his absence, that of his uncle. Falkland’s father belonged to an old ancestry and prided himself on the antiquity of his name, as, in his youth, he had served in the army, but he also praised the importance of intellectual knowledge. Considering his late father as “a great country gentleman, a great sportsman, and a great Tory,”⁵⁸ Falkland admits that the sudden death of his father was the event that most changed his life in his youth. From then onwards, his uncle, Don Alphonso D’Aguilar, of Spanish extraction, takes over the role of Falkland’s father and becomes his nephew’s guardian, asking Falkland to fight in battle in Spain under the command of General Riego, and thus initiating him in the military career.

In analogy with Falkland, Bulwer-Lytton also saw himself mirrored in two paternal figures, which were mostly his father, General William Bulwer, and, following the latter’s premature decease, his maternal grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton would go on to consider the inheritance of his grandfather’s books to be one of the most important events of his childhood, as they initiated him in study and learning and they also propelled his creative vein, and ultimately, his love of writing. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton’s father, General William Bulwer, who had risen high in his military career,⁵⁹ would also exert an important influence over Bulwer-Lytton, despite his stern character and his overt detachment from his youngest son. Significantly enough, of all his grandfather’s books, Bulwer-Lytton felt particularly attracted towards chivalric romances such as *Amadis de Gaula*,⁶⁰ arguably because they reminded him of

⁵⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 14.

⁵⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s father was General William Earle Bulwer of Heydon Hall and Wood Dalling, from Norfolk.

⁶⁰ *Amadis de Gaula* is a landmark work among the chivalric romances in sixteenth-century Spain. Even though its first version was written at the onset of the fourteenth-century, the earliest surviving edition, by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, was published in Zaragoza, Spain, in 1508, in four books written in Castilian. The basic plot revolves around the love of King Perion of Gaul and Elisena of England, which results in the secret birth of Amadis. After having been abandoned at birth on a barge in England, Amadis is raised by the knight Gandales in Scotland and investigates his origins through a series of chivalric

his father and allowed him to indulge in reveries of General William Bulwer's adventurous feats. Bulwer-Lytton became so haunted by these romances that he even considered the possibility of pursuing a military career. In this sense, years later, in his autobiography he would admit that the novels he had written were mere "wild and imperfect attempts to satisfy the longings of that passion,"⁶¹ which he never achieved in real life. Significantly, Bulwer-Lytton's early literary character, Falkland, eventually considers pursuing the military career, and likewise, influenced by his father's own profession, in his youth Bulwer-Lytton entertained the possibility of becoming a soldier, even buying a commission in the army as soon as he came of age, and considering the possibility of seeking action in service overseas.

Despite the early influences of both his father's military career and his grandfather's scholarly gifts, Bulwer-Lytton would become neither a soldier nor a scholar. Nonetheless, both paternal figures would remain utterly influential in Bulwer-Lytton's life, and in fact, his hero, Falkland, also imbibes qualities pertaining to both. From his grandfather, Bulwer-Lytton inherited his everlasting thirst for knowledge, even if he found himself unable to pursue the same course of life as a scholar. In this sense, in his adulthood, Bulwer-Lytton would confess that he would have liked to be like his grandfather, stating, "it is greater to live for knowledge, than to live by it,"⁶² thus acknowledging their common interest in learning. But while his grandfather loved learning for its own sake and was able to devote his entire life to its pursuit, Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled, instead, to make use of his learning to earn a living. Moreover, Bulwer-Lytton inherited his father's strength of character, his will and his ambition, also acknowledging his passion for the military career early on in his youth. However, the lack of his father's combative spirit and his own rather precarious health finally obliterated his early ambition to become a soldier later in life, even if admitting he had seriously considered becoming a soldier as a young man.

adventures. It must also be noticed that, in response to his lifetime attraction to chivalric romance, later in life, Bulwer-Lytton would write his epic poem *King Arthur* (1848).

⁶¹ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 106.

⁶² Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 101.

If Bulwer-Lytton paid homage to his grandfather as a scholar and to his father as a soldier through the figure of Falkland, the features characterising the characters of Mentoni and the stranger in Poe's tale "The Assignment" are also strongly remindful of individuals that Poe would envision as father figures or male models to emulate, mostly, his foster father, John Allan, and his biological father, David Poe. In Poe's tale, Mentoni, is characterised as a man of high rank, who considers himself above others, and who symbolises morals in contrast with what he perceives as the devious behaviour of his wife and the Byronic stranger, in clear resemblance with John Allan's profile. As a wealthy tobacco merchant in Richmond, John Allan was considered a stern self-made man, who had left his Scottish origins behind in order to start a new life in the United States, and even if he underwent financial difficulties at a time, he managed to overcome them and to succeed in most of his endeavours. Nevertheless, as a businessman, he was thoroughly pragmatic and demanding on others, and – being devoted to the ethics of self-help – he could tolerate no sign of laziness and indolence. Poe would necessarily grow up in the shadow of his foster father John Allan, since, despite their increasingly-fraught relationship, throughout his childhood Poe regarded John Allan as his father, and it was mostly through him that Poe was first initiated into books. Likewise, owing to the importance that Allan gave to education, Poe was given the chance of attending schools in Scotland and England, before going back to Richmond to begin his university studies. Hence, had he never been adopted by the Allans, Poe arguably would have never been granted the sort of education considered becoming to a Southern gentleman. For this reason, according to biographer Peter Ackroyd, when the Allans agreed to accept Poe as their foster-child, his mother Elizabeth described her son as the child of fortune.⁶³ Nevertheless, for Poe himself, becoming attached to the Allans was both fortunate and unfortunate, since the fact of being raised by a family who held no biological bonds with him inevitably rendered him an object of charity, granting him a perpetual sense of uncertainty, insecurity, and even defensiveness that necessarily became aggravated when his relations with his foster father began to deteriorate.

⁶³ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 14.

In sharp contrast with the figure of Mentoni, the Byronic stranger in Poe's tale is characterised through features that appear to be strongly remindful of those of Poe's biological father, David Poe, particularly in his detachment and love for art as a bohemian stage performer, which rendered him necessarily different from John Allan, insofar as the Byronic stranger also becomes the antagonist of Mentoni in the tale. Defying the expectations that his father, General Poe, had placed on him, David Poe began his career as a stage performer when he fell in love with Elizabeth Arnold and joined the theatre company where she worked as one of the leading actresses. In spite of his fondness for drama, as he abandoned everything for a career on the stage, David Poe led an erratic life, being independent by nature and prone to temperamental outbursts. In his passionate love for Elizabeth Arnold, in addition to his Byronic and bohemian qualities, David Poe resembles the stranger in Poe's tale, in particular, bearing in mind the tragic end that awaits both lovers in Poe's tale and which turns "The Assniation" into Poe's particular homage to his deceased biological parents, Elizabeth and David.

Drawing further on biographical facts, Bulwer-Lytton's portrayal of the character of Emily Mandeville in his early novella bears resemblance to his mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, in her youth, given the important role that the sense of duty and honourability plays in Emily's life, even though she finally succumbs to temptation in Bulwer-Lytton's early novella. In fact, in his autobiography Bulwer-Lytton claims that he was born when his mother's married life was presumed to be at its saddest.⁶⁴ As Bulwer-Lytton recounts in his autobiography, even when she was long past the age of sixty, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton still retained the grace and shape of her youth, but gradually, in old age, the fragility of her constitution began to cause deterioration in her appearance, mostly due to grief and distress on account of her late husband, since Bulwer-Lytton laid the blame for his mother's anxiety mainly at the door of his father's jealous nature, which always caused Elizabeth Barbara great sorrow.

Bulwer-Lytton described his mother in youth as handsome, modest and extremely shy, stating that she often received poems by a series of admirers. In fact,

⁶⁴ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 76.

before she became engaged to General William Bulwer, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton had had other suitors, but from among them, she would always single out one whose memory would pervade her life, even long after her marriage. In this sense, in his autobiography Bulwer-Lytton recalls an outstanding episode in his mother's life, highlighting its importance and describing it as "that event in the history of women which, in earnest natures, stands single and alone among the joys and sorrows of the heart."⁶⁵ According to Bulwer-Lytton, his mother first fell in love at the age of twenty-two with a young man called Rawlins, whom she met in a chapel of Quebec Street in London, where her family used to go to for Mass every Sunday. Bulwer-Lytton's testimony of his mother's acquaintance with Rawlins bears a significantly close resemblance with Emily Mandeville's first meeting with Falkland, since, in analogy with Bulwer-Lytton's hero, Falkland, Rawlins was highly considered in society and had travelled abroad, while, in resemblance with Emily's acquaintance with Falkland, Elizabeth Barbara also blushed profusely upon meeting him at a social gathering, and their attachment was also very much influenced by Elizabeth Barbara's high sense of duty. As Bulwer-Lytton recounts in his autobiography, it was in church that Elizabeth Barbara's mother drew her daughter's attention to Rawlins, who saluted her with particular deference, causing Elizabeth Barbara to blush profusely. Some days later, as happens in Bulwer-Lytton's novella with regard to Falkland and Emily, at a party given by a foreign minister Elizabeth Barbara was finally introduced to Rawlins, whom she had first seen in church. Like Falkland, young Rawlins was fair and grave, and having travelled to Germany and France, he had acquired certain distinction. From that prophetic meeting, Elizabeth Barbara and Rawlins became closely attached to each other, spending some time in the countryside with her family, in Tunbridge Wells, and thus ultimately initiating a relationship. As Bulwer-Lytton observes in his autobiography, despite the fact that Rawlins was a younger son, without fortune, and of significantly inferior rank, Elizabeth Barbara judged Rawlins for his virtue and distinction, and especially, for the affection that he managed to arouse in her, and in this

⁶⁵ Robert Bulwer-Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 56.

sense, even in her old age, Elizabeth Barbara would still refer to Rawlins with utmost respect. However, as happens with the tragic relationship between Falkland and Emily in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, the hopes of happiness of Rawlins and Elizabeth Barbara were also to become utterly shattered.

In contrast with Emily in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Elizabeth Barbara was finally drawn by her high sense of responsibility and duty, especially given her social status. In this respect, Elizabeth Barbara was to receive a letter on behalf of her father, Richard Warburton, whereby Bulwer-Lytton's mother learned that her father rejected Rawlins as her prospective husband, which involved an important blow for her in her youth. According to her son, Bulwer-Lytton, Elizabeth Barbara's father's refusal was probably grounded in different reasons, such as the fact that Richard Warburton's consent would imply giving the young couple an important pecuniary provision and that, owing to social conventions, Richard Warburton wanted his daughter to marry the man he chose for her. Despite the fact that Elizabeth Barbara's mother, Elizabeth Jodrell, urged her daughter to marry Rawlins and disregard her father's disapproval, Elizabeth Barbara decided to do her duty and ultimately accept her father's decision. As Bulwer-Lytton admits in his autobiography, at an early age his mother had to face the arduous task of addressing Rawlins a poignant letter, informing him that their courtship had to be brought to an end. From this dramatic episode onwards, in her life, Elizabeth Barbara would always give more importance to her responsibility as an heiress than to her own personal wishes and affections. Quite aware of this, her son, Bulwer-Lytton, would explain this event in his mother's life in the following terms:

Duty had become so interwoven with all her feelings and motives for action, that it had obtained the strength of an instinct.

And so, with a trembling hand, she wrote to Mr. Rawlins, cited, in softening it, her father's letter, and closed the dream of her life.

She remembered every word of her own letter, and I once coaxed her into copying it for me. [...] Through the formal style and the brief sentences, there was a latent depth of feeling, an unconscious sigh from the whole simple,

modest, breaking heart, which a poet (but perhaps your true poet only) would have found more pathetic than his most burning verse.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, in spite of Elizabeth Barbara's grief, her high sense of duty appeared to be entirely misunderstood by Rawlins, who thought that true love could not possibly submit to such an exertion of duty. Accordingly, he judged her harshly and accused her of preferring wealth to affection upon learning years later that she was entangled in an unhappy marriage to General William Bulwer. Like Falkland in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, though, Rawlins was to meet a tragic end in a foreign land, since, soon after his separation from Elizabeth Barbara, he left England for India, where he died only two years after her marriage.

Bulwer-Lytton's mother, Elizabeth Barbara, eventually married General William Bulwer, whom she had known since childhood, as he had been her mother's counsellor for long in matters of business. In clear resemblance with Falkland in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, General William Bulwer had been subjected to grief and mourning owing to the tragic death of the woman with whom he had been attached for many years, and at the time he longed to find in Elizabeth Barbara a valuable companion. However, General William Bulwer also shared some traits with Emily Mandeville's husband, insofar as they shared their military career, and for the most part, remained detached husbands. Despite her affection for General William Bulwer, at first Elizabeth Barbara felt compelled to reject his proposal, arguing that, after her previous attachment to Rawlins, any prospects of marriage seemed to her out of the question. Nevertheless, according to her son Bulwer-Lytton, Elizabeth Barbara eventually changed her mind, probably out of sympathy, when she saw Bulwer again shortly after his mother's demise. Accordingly, at the time the General was nearly forty years of age and Elizabeth Barbara was some years older, she finally decided to consent to his proposal of marriage. Nonetheless, even if apparently leaving her romance with Rawlins behind, in his autobiography Bulwer-Lytton would describe this period in his mother's life in the following terms:

⁶⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 62.

After heroically burning the letters of Mr. Rawlins, and consigning to the care of her mother (sealed up and never reopened till her widowhood) some slight innocent tokens of the old romance, Elizabeth Lytton passed to the marriage altar; perhaps with a foreboding heart, but with a firm resolve to discharge the new duties the new situation called for.⁶⁷

As a mature woman, Bulwer-Lytton's mother thus duly accepted her duty as prospective heiress of the Lyttons, marrying General William Bulwer, who was an ambitious man of business and military ascendancy but who lacked Elizabeth Barbara's fondness for literature and art, in clear resemblance with Emily Mandeville's stern husband in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, who fails to bring her happiness.

If Bulwer-Lytton's novella can be interpreted as a literary transposition of Bulwer-Lytton's mother's romantic feelings for Rawlins in her youth and her ultimate marriage to General Bulwer through his creation of the character of Emily Mandeville, Poe's early tale "The Assination" – through its plot and the characterisation of its female protagonist, the Marchesa di Mentoni – also bears a close resemblance with some of the circumstances that Poe's biological mother, Elizabeth Arnold, had to bear in her early youth. In fact, the ghost of a troubled married life seemed to characterise the sentimental lives of the mothers of both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe. While Elizabeth Barbara Lytton married General Bulwer mostly out of her high sense of duty and responsibility, it seems that Elizabeth Arnold got married owing to her humble and precarious circumstances, and likewise, if Elizabeth Barbara Lytton's marriage was always regarded as not entirely happy, Elizabeth Arnold's married life turned out to be utterly tragic.

Poe's mother, Elizabeth Arnold, was only fifteen years old when she married Charles Hopkins, who was a teenage actor who had recently joined the theatrical company in which she performed. It was Charles Hopkins, who, soon after joining the company, had developed a strong affection for Elizabeth and decided to propose to her. According to biographer Nigel Barnes, despite her young age Elizabeth accepted to become Charles Hopkins' wife mostly because she needed a protector to take care of

⁶⁷ General William Bulwer and Elizabeth Barbara Lytton got married on 1st June 1798. See Robert Lytton's *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 72.

her in the unsavoury places they visited due to their theatrical profession. Her marriage granted her security, and to use Nigel Barnes' words, "she had plenty of time to gauge her feelings."⁶⁸ Nevertheless, when he turned twenty, Charles Hopkins fell ill and died, leaving Elizabeth widowed at the age of eighteen and obliterating the sense of protection that her marriage had so far afforded her. As a young widow, Elizabeth Arnold resumed her professional career in Richmond, where, on stage, she often took the role of the lover or wife of David Poe, who was a young actor and dancer that had recently joined the company. In Nigel Barnes' view, David Poe chose to become a professional actor when he saw Elizabeth acting in Norfolk and felt love-struck to the extent that he decided to follow her in her acting career,⁶⁹ even though, at that time, she was still married to her first husband, Charles Hopkins.

There are no records that state whether Elizabeth Arnold was in love with David Poe, but she had been a widow for no longer than six months when she accepted his proposal to marry her. They had known each other for two years, and David Poe had felt attracted towards her from the very first moment, hence it could be argued that the roles that these two performers played on stage as lovers turned, ultimately, into reality. However, their marriage was far from being happy and fulfilling, especially on account of David Poe's jealousy. Hence, an acute sense of mistrust soon threatened their marriage, in not an entirely different way from that of General Bulwer and Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, mostly on account of the husband's covetous personality. In an example of interaction between life and fiction, her last role in Shakespeare's play *Othello* – in which Elizabeth Poe had to face her husband's accusations of disloyalty – would provide her with a foretaste of the accusations that were soon to transcend into her real life. As will be shown, the ghost of illicitness menaced the marriage of the Poe family, through the haunting presence of an unknown lover, in clear resemblance with the love triangle that Poe would envision in his early tale "The Assigination" between the characters of the Marchesa di Mentoni, her husband, and the Byronic stranger.

⁶⁸ Nigel Barnes. *A Dream within a Dream: The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*. (London: Peter Owen, 2009): 17.

⁶⁹ Nigel Barnes. *A Dream within a Dream: The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*. (London: Peter Owen, 2009): 19.

The tragic demise of a love of youth: Lucy and Jane Stanard

Drawing on the tenets of courtly love in chivalric romances, the knight worships the figure of a lady of a superior rank, and, precisely through his awareness that her love is unattainable, she is ultimately idealised. Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Falkland* and Poe's tale "The Assignation" also explicitly tackle the loss of an idealised love, and by extension, the process of leaving behind the ideals often associated with the life stage of youth. When Bulwer-Lytton's *Falkland* was published, its author was twenty-four years of age and it can be argued that, through the writing of this novella, Bulwer-Lytton mostly addressed the departure of his boyhood, in homage and clear reference to what he considered to be the most important turning-point in his early life, namely, the demise of his first love. In his early compilation of essays entitled *The Student: A Series of Papers*, Bulwer-Lytton stated that there are three stages in life that are more distinctly marked than the rest, which are the departure of boyhood, the departure of youth, and the commencement of old age, arguing that these three stages frequently occur at the ages of fifteen, thirty, and fifty, respectively.⁷⁰ In this sense, at the onset of Bulwer-Lytton's novella, *Falkland* admits a yearning for the affection he had felt in his early youth, which vanished following the death of his first love, and, after suffering acute grief, he acknowledges that the experience of years has taught him to consider the recollections of the past with suspicion and accept that the time to enjoy love departed along with his boyhood.

According to James Campbell, in analogy with his hero *Falkland*, Bulwer-Lytton's first experience of being in love was "a platonic love affair that profoundly shaped his life and gave rise to his lifelong romantic idealism."⁷¹ In like manner, Bulwer-Lytton claims in his autobiography that he first fell in love during the summer of 1820, when he was seventeen and had been sent to Ealing to study with the Reverend Charles Wallington before pursuing his university studies at Cambridge. Even though Bulwer-Lytton felt bound not to mention the name of the girl in his autobiography, James Campbell identified her under the name of Lucy, stating that the young couple

⁷⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "On the Departure of Youth." *The Student: A Series of Papers*, vol. I. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1836): 49.

⁷¹ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 3.

used to meet in Ealing on the banks of the river Brent. Even though Bulwer-Lytton described this affair as an idealistic rather than a real love, like his literary character Falkland, he would eventually claim that, after its tragic outcome, he would find himself changed for life, ultimately becoming more introspective, melancholic, and eager to enjoy solitude. In this respect, in his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton underlined the change this event represented in his life in these terms:

Till then I had been irascible, combative, rash, foolhardy. Afterwards, my temper grew more soft and gentle, and my courage was rather the result of pride and jealous honour than the fearless instinct that rejoiced in danger. My ambition, too, became greatly subdued; nor did it ever return to what it was in boyhood.⁷²

Despite the fact that Bulwer-Lytton acknowledged the importance of this event in his life, he seemed somehow reluctant to dwell upon it in depth in his autobiography. However, it was precisely his son Robert, who, on compiling his father's documents after his demise, managed to discover Bulwer-Lytton's own manuscript of this event, written during an early period in his literary career.

Robert Lytton would describe his father's youthful affair as an 'idyll,' which brings to mind Alfred Lord Tennyson's chivalric work *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885), thus noticing how Bulwer-Lytton's early affection for a young woman presented many points in common with the characters in romances of the chivalric tradition, whose popularity was revived in Victorian times. Drawing on the features pertaining to the tradition of courtly love, as regards its *locus amoenus*, the affair between Bulwer-Lytton and Lucy took place in the midst of nature by the river Brent, which also echoes John Keats' medieval ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819), inasmuch as it features a knight entrapped by a lady while surrounded by sublime scenery. Likewise, Lucy, the 'knight's lady,' was presumed to be some years older than Bulwer-Lytton himself and was also of wealthy ascendancy, while Bulwer-Lytton's love for Lucy was considered as morally elevating and as an experience regarded as an act of initiation, since, as

⁷² Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 160.

Bulwer-Lytton states in his autobiography, their attachment was pure, but also passionate, as it was rigorously concealed from others. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton considered his early affair with Lucy as “something infinitely happier and less earthly”⁷³ than real love, thus corroborating its idealistic rather than physical nature.

The tragic end of Bulwer-Lytton’s first love resonates with literary echoes, as happens to Falkland at the onset of Bulwer-Lytton’s novella. As Robert Lytton recounts, in his autobiographical narrative Bulwer-Lytton states that, at their last meeting, he gave Lucy a book, making her promise she was not to lend it to anyone else, while they arranged to meet, as usual, on the following day. However, they were never to see each other again, and it was not until some months later that Bulwer-Lytton received a letter informing him of the fact that Lucy had got married. In his biography of his father, Robert infers that Lucy’s father disapproved of her relationship with Bulwer-Lytton and had put an end to their attachment, forcing his daughter into marriage. Nonetheless, Lucy profoundly resented the end of their love as she was to show in a letter she addressed to Bulwer-Lytton three years later, when she was on her deathbed. In a deeply poignant epistle, Lucy disclosed her suffering and everlasting devotion to Bulwer-Lytton, asking him to visit her grave as her end was close at hand. In response to Lucy’s request, Bulwer-Lytton made a pilgrimage to her grave in the neighbourhood of Ullswater⁷⁴ in the summer of 1824, well aware that the memory of her love would exert an everlasting effect on him. The sublime nature surrounding the lake Ullswater is once more associated with literary echoes, insofar as it is claimed that the Romantic poet William Wordsworth became inspired to write his famous poem “Daffodils” upon seeing daffodils growing on the shores of Ullswater on his journey to Grasmere.

According to James Campbell, “this romantic disappointment threw Bulwer-Lytton into a state of Byronic melancholy, leaving him depressed and indifferent to

⁷³ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 163.

⁷⁴ Ullswater is the second largest lake in the English Lake District, and many regard Ullswater as one of the most beautiful of the English lakes, as William Wordsworth regarded Ullswater as the happiest combination of beauty and grandeur, which any of the Lakes affords. See William Wordsworth’s *Wordsworth’s Guide to the Lakes* (1835) (London: Humphrey Milford, 1926).

life.”⁷⁵ This turning-point would also lead Bulwer-Lytton to devote his life to literature, modelling heroines that closely resemble Lucy and making recurrent allusions to such melancholic event in many of the works he was to publish years later. Specifically, Bulwer-Lytton first referred to this biographical episode in his first novella, *Falkland*, since, in the context of one of the letters, the protagonist, Erasmus Falkland, addresses his friend Frederick Monkton, in which the former recollects an important event in his boyhood, which ultimately accounts for his introspection and inward-looking nature in youth. In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, the affair that gave closure to Falkland’s boyhood is explained in this way:

It is enough for that purpose of my confessions that the events of that period were connected with the first awakening of the most powerful of human passions, and that, whatever their commencement, their end was despair! And she – the object of that love – the only being in the world who ever possessed the secret and the spell of my nature – her life was the bitterness and the fever of a troubled heart, – her rest is the grave. That attachment was not so much a single event, as the first link in a long chain which was coiled around my heart. It was after the first violent grief produced by it that I began to apply with earnestness to books.⁷⁶

The passage quoted above from *Falkland* clearly resembles Bulwer-Lytton’s own autobiographical ponderings about his early attachment to Lucy and her eventual death as a result of grief. Likewise, Falkland also describes this experience as a turning point that reverberated through all his life, changing his character, and making him more meditative in nature. Actually, as a case in point, this everlasting reverberation led Robert, Bulwer-Lytton’s son, to assume that even the love episode included in the last novel that his father would write, *Kenelm Chillingly* (1873), published posthumously, still responded to his recollections in old age of the love affair that he had had with Lucy in his adolescence.

Due to this experience, Bulwer-Lytton regarded this event in his early youth as a turning-point that made him grow up, as he found himself going through a period of

⁷⁵ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 3.

⁷⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown: Pennsylvania, 2004): 18.

deep grief and unhappiness at an unusually young age. In this respect, in his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton would recall:

The middle-aged ladies took me home in their carriages, for I was but a boy. The young ones did not disdain me as a partner – for I was almost a man. In fact, I forestalled the natural growth of years: and, enjoying my youth too soon, I renounced its tastes when I should have commenced them. At the age of twenty-two, I hated balls as much as they are hated by most men of twenty-eight. For experience, which is time, had advanced me six years in the progress to satiety. [...] Woe is me even now, when I recall the gloom wherein my boyhood vanished!⁷⁷

Bulwer-Lytton's sense of maturity, despite his youth, is imprinted upon the characterisation he makes of the protagonist of *Falkland*. In analogy with the hero of his novella and aware of his unusual condition, Bulwer-Lytton addressed a letter to his then wife-to-be, Rosina Wheeler, inquiring: "Have you got *Falkland* yet? – it is singular to me that I should be so young and have so little of the eagerness of youth."⁷⁸ Bulwer-Lytton's words denote the author's insight into his process of aging, thus sharing his reflections on aging at an unusually young age.

If Bulwer-Lytton's *Falkland* discusses the painful loss of a first love and is clearly grounded in its author's biographical experience, Poe's early tale "The Assignment" also addresses the end of an idealised attachment and bears resemblance with the actual experience of its author. Biographers such as Kenneth Silverman agree on the fact that Poe first fell in love at the age of fourteen, when he became infatuated with Jane Stith Stanard, the mother of Robert Stanard, one of his closest classmates at William Burke's school in Richmond.⁷⁹ At that time, Poe had recently returned from England, and having spent some years abroad and showing a pre-eminently European upbringing, he might have felt somewhat out of place in the community at the time. One day, Robert Stanard took his friend Poe home and introduced him to his mother Jane

⁷⁷ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, vol. I. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 135.

⁷⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Rosina Wheeler, Knebworth, Welwyn." 13th March 1827. *Letters of the Late Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, to His Wife*. (New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1889): 207.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 26.

Stith Stanard. According to biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn, it seems that a bond of sympathy was immediately established between them at a time when Poe needed it most. Being a widow of over thirty years of age, Jane Stith Stanard was beautiful and sensitive, and soon became the object of Poe's idealisation. When he felt estranged from the Allans, Poe would often visit Jane Stanard to share some of his poems, and she would encourage him to pursue his adolescent ambition to become a poet. Poe's love for Jane Stith Stanard was infused with a singularly platonic idealism, which would condition his perception of women and of love from then onwards. Having lost his biological mother at an early age, in his adolescence, Poe might have felt especially attracted towards a mature woman, looking for protection in an alternative mother figure. Hence, Poe's visits to Jane Stanard extended for months, and according to Maria Clemm, even for years,⁸⁰ thus finding in Jane his truly first romantic relationship.

Even though Poe's love for Jane Stanard developed in his youth, her memory would accompany Poe throughout his life. As evidence of Poe's everlasting devotion, he was to dedicate her one of his most highly-acclaimed poems, "To Helen," which was first published in 1831 in his collection of poetry entitled *Poems, by Edgar A. Poe*.⁸¹ Of significant classical influence, recalling the glories of ancient times from Greece and Rome, the poem characterises its protagonist, Helen, as a Greek heroine who provides the fatigued wanderer with peace and solace, which was precisely what Poe was in need of at the time. By using the poetic and historic name of Helen, daughter of Zeus and supreme symbol of beauty, Poe identified Jane Stanard with a classical figure, immortal and ideal, who was to remain the embodied image of his idealised beloved. Poe's poem also refers to spiritual love as the source from which to attain beauty,⁸² thus underlining the fact that Poe's love for Jane Stanard was mostly of an idealistic nature. This portrait

⁸⁰ Arthur Hobson Quinn makes reference to one of Maria Clemm's letters addressed to Helen Whitman, dated 14th April 1859, in which Poe's aunt and mother-in-law assert that Poe visited Jane Stanard in her home for years. See Arthur Hobson Quinn's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 87.

⁸¹ Edgar Allan Poe. *Poems, by Edgar A. Poe*. (New York: Elam Bliss, 1831).

⁸² Thomas Ollive Mabbott gives this interpretation of Poe's poem "To Helen" in his essay entitled "To Helen (Thy Beauty is To Me)," included in Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. I: Poems*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969): 163.

of an idealised woman would recur in many of Poe's writings, from his early poems to his last tales, but it is precisely in his tale "The Assination" in which Poe provides one of the earliest portraits of an idealised woman through the depiction of the Marchesa di Mentoni.

Nevertheless, the devotion that Poe felt for Jane Stanard ultimately ended in tragedy, since, even if she closely resembled Elizabeth Poe and Frances Allan insofar as she also became a motherly figure for Poe, Jane Stanard also shared with them a delicate condition, as she suffered a premature demise, passing away when she was only thirty-one years of age. Jane Stanard had been a victim of depression for several years, and it seems the cause of her illness had to do with a dramatic event that bound her even closer to Poe in biographical terms. According to Kenneth Silverman, Jane Stanard had been unable to accept her mother's re-marriage and "the installation in her father's place of someone she could not respect."⁸³ As a result of this change in her close family, in addition to her particularly acute sensitivity, Jane Stanard often yielded to melancholy and conceded that she suffered from a "death-like sickness."⁸⁴ Thus, afflicted with some sort of insanity, she died only one year after Poe had met her for the first time in Richmond. Jane Stanard's predicament would prove prophetic for Poe, as only a few years later, after Frances Allan's tragic death, John Allan would also remarry, and like Jane Stanard, Poe was never to be on good terms with his foster father's second spouse, Louisa Gabriella Patterson.

Poe's memory of Jane Stanard would exert an important influence on him, as the melancholy that he felt in his early youth after the premature demise of his first idealised love would accompany him until the very last years of his life, as is revealed in his frequent references to the memory of Jane Stanard. As a case in point, in a letter dated June 1848, addressed to Marie Louise Shew, Virginia Clemm's nurse in her final days, Poe still made reference to Jane Stanard comparing her to Marie Louise Shew to whom he wrote, "I place you in my esteem in all solemnity beside the friend of my

⁸³ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 26.

⁸⁴ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 26.

boyhood, the mother of my school fellow, of whom I told you.”⁸⁵ Likewise, in a letter to Sarah Helen Whitman, with whom he had had a close relationship at the end of his life, Poe established a bond between its addressee and Jane Stanard, especially through the poems Poe dedicated to both of them under the same title, “To Helen.” In this letter, dated 1st October 1848, Poe referred to Jane Stanard in this way:

I had written, in my passionate boyhood, to the first, purely ideal love of my soul – to the Helen Stanard of whom I told you – flashed upon my recollection. I turned to them. They expressed all – all that I would have said to you – so fully – so accurately and so exclusively.⁸⁶

Poe’s willed connection between Jane Stanard and the different women in his life – in particular Sarah Helen Whitman – implies that Poe would always consider his classmate’s mother as his first, purely-ideal love. Jane Stanard thus became the embodiment of an idealised beloved that Poe would recurrently look for in subsequent relationships with women who necessarily reminded him of her. In this respect, Jane Stanard became Poe’s ‘Helen,’ the ideal and spiritual love that Poe was to seek for life. The influence that Jane Stanard was to exert on Poe extended to his writings, especially because her tragic end would essentially shape Poe’s concept of the most poetic topic in the world, namely, the death of a beautiful woman, which he was to develop in his essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846). Having lost his biological mother when he was only two, it was through the premature demise of his first love that Poe would mostly gain awareness of death. In clear analogy with Bulwer-Lytton’s visits to Lucy’s grave, Poe’s visits to the grave of Jane Stanard in Shockoe Hill cemetery also became frequent, and for some time, he grew significantly dejected and melancholic, as Poe’s aunt, and subsequent mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, referred to Poe’s visits to Jane Stanard’s grave even when he was already married to Virginia Clemm. Moreover, only five years after Jane Stanard’s demise, Poe would also have to bear the premature death of his foster mother, Frances Allan, who was also buried in Shockoe Hill cemetery.

⁸⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Marie Louise Shew.” June 1848. See *Poe’s Letters on the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. <www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4806000.htm>

⁸⁶ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Sarah Helen Whitman.” 1st October 1848. See *Poe’s Letters on the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. <www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4810010.htm>

Hence, Jane Stanard's untimely death and Poe's everlasting memory of her would set a precedent that Poe was to incorporate in tales in which women die and awake into a new life. This paradigm underlines Poe's continuous search for this ideal conceptualisation, for his 'Helen,' in alternative women figures through all his life who would die to live again in his tales.

In her nature and tragic end, the literary transposition of the first love of his youth – of Jane Stanard – into the idealised figure of the Marchesa Mentoni in Poe's "The Assigination" finds its counterpart in the portrayal of Emily Mandeville in Bulwer-Lytton's *Falkland*, who was envisioned as a tribute to Bulwer-Lytton's early infatuations with his beloved and innocent Lucy. In Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Emily Mandeville is the wife of a Member of Parliament and mother of a three-year-old child, who got married at sixteen and gave birth to her child at eighteen. However, regardless of the fact that she is a wife and mother, Emily retains the ingenuousness and inexperience of a child, thereby conforming to the Coventry Patmore's archetypal Victorian figure of the 'angel of the house.'⁸⁷ Despite her innate shyness, as a woman belonging to the upper-classes Emily often attends social gatherings, and it is there that she first hears of her lover to be, who, in clear resemblance with Byron, is often described as a character possessing every feature to please society such as youth, good manners, talent, and knowledge of the world as a result of his studiousness and his journeys abroad.

Even though Emily Mandeville and Falkland are formally introduced when they are both invited to Lady Margaret's dinner, Emily had already been acquainted with Falkland when she took a walk in the countryside, which, in biographical terms, is highly remindful of Bulwer-Lytton's acquaintance with Lucy. In Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Emily finds Falkland lying down sleeping beside a volume of Shakespeare's play *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Emily's attention focuses on one of the passages that the sleeper seems to have been perusing, finding herself reciting 'the course of true love

⁸⁷ "The Angel of the House" is a poem written by Coventry Patmore, which was first published in 1854 and expanded in 1862. It became very popular in the nineteenth-century as an idealised account of the poet's courtship with his first wife, Emily. The phrase 'the angel of the house' came to be used in critical theory with respect to women who embodied the Victorian feminine ideal.

never did run smooth,' which turns into a line that will remain significant and prophetic for the fate that awaits both lovers. Subsequently, Emily meets Falkland again at a social gathering at Lady Margaret's manor house, where Emily recognises in Falkland the man she had met lying by the lake, and she cannot help blushing when she replies to Falkland's greeting. If Emily Mandeville blushes when she is first introduced to Falkland, in Poe's tale "The Assigination" the narrator also notices the Marchesa di Mentoni's shyness when the stranger approaches her after having rescued her child from death by drowning, and he significantly wonders "[w]hy should that lady blush! To this demand there is no answer."⁸⁸ Likewise, drawing on this concatenation of intertextuality between both works, according to Falkland, Emily Mandeville's countenance denotes both happiness and gloom, making use of the antithesis "too feeling to be gay, and too innocent to be sad."⁸⁹ In analogy with Emily Mandeville in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, in Poe's tale, the narrator reflects on the Marchesa di Mentoni's singular beauty, as he beholds her portrait in the stranger's abode and highlights the oxymoronic blending of melancholy and mirth in her face, again strongly remindful of Poe's first love, Jane Stith Stanard:

[...] in the expression of the countenance, which was beaming all over with smiles, there still lurked [...] that fitful stain of melancholy which will ever found inseparable from the perfection of the beautiful."⁹⁰

Consequently, despite both heroines' apparent radiance, they both betray an acute sensibility – melancholy even – that renders them particularly vulnerable. Both being wives and mothers, they are no longer in their early youth, but in their early womanhood, beginning to gain insight into their true feelings and about to face an event that will unleash their process of aging.

⁸⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assigination)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 154.

⁸⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 39.

⁹⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assigination)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 164.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Emily Mandeville undergoes an important turning-point in her life that has an important effect on her aging process. So far she has led a life devoid of grief and turmoil, devoted to her duty and accepting her assigned role as a Victorian wife and mother. Nonetheless, Emily's high sense of duty and responsibility, as well as her innate innocence, prevents her from noticing the affection that she is beginning to feel for Falkland. As her affection towards Falkland increases, Emily's countenance gradually suffers a perceptible change, which reflects the transformation that she is progressively undergoing. Owing to her growing attachment to Falkland, Emily also acquires some of his ways – his mournful and melancholy look as well as his nonchalance. Her slow but gradual insight into her own desires adds a feeling of guilt to her newly-acquired melancholic ways, which causes her to age prematurely and to look older than her actual chronologically age. In due course, Falkland notices the transformation that Emily gradually suffers as a result of their increasing attachment:

Since Falkland had known Emily, her character was much altered. Six weeks before the time I write of, and in playfulness and lightness of spirits she was almost a child: now those indications of an unawakened heart had mellowed into a tenderness full of melancholy.⁹¹

As opposed to Emily Mandeville, whose guilty affection quickens her process of aging, Falkland's usual moody ways are turned into happiness, even though he is well-aware of the agony that Emily is suffering on his account. Aware that he is the only one to be blamed, in spite of his joy Falkland feels guilty, and like the stranger in Poe's tale "The Assignment," he feels he is doomed, thus claiming: "I wander in the delirium of a fatal fever, in which I see dreams of a brighter life, but everyone of them only brings me nearer to death."⁹² In spite of his sense of doom, through his infatuation with Emily, Falkland has regained the strength and vitality that he has lacked for years in his yearned detachment from life. Conversely, though, Emily Mandeville experiences an ongoing process of premature aging owing to guilt and the awareness of her infidelity. As will be shown, Emily's gradual decline finds its counterpart in the process that the

⁹¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 63.

⁹² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 53.

Marchesa di Mentoni undergoes in Poe's tale "The Assignment," as she metaphorically transforms from a goddess in a portrait into a human being.

From grace to disloyalty: leaving behind ideals and succumbing to reality

In the classical tradition of courtly love, illicit love and adultery usually characterise the relationship between the knight and his lady, mostly typified by the illicit relationship of Lancelot with Guinevere in the cycle of Arthurian chivalric romances and that between Tristan and Isolde. In Bulwer-Lytton's novella *Falkland*, owing to the fact that Emily Mandeville is a married woman, the passionate relationship uniting both lovers, Falkland and Emily, seems to be cursed from its beginning mostly as a result of a haunting sense of guilt. In particular, Emily's sense of culpability becomes mostly perceptible in her countenance, which has undergone an important change in a short span of time, and leads Emily to grow anxious when her husband informs her of his forthcoming arrival, as she feels certain he will enquire after her paleness and the alteration she has suddenly gone through. In contrast to Emily's delicate condition, Falkland feels jubilant and, in a letter to his lover, he admits that he has gained strength and eagerness, confessing that his love for Emily accounts for his unusual vitality and rejuvenation:

[i]t is you, who, when I was most weary of existence, gifted me with a new life. You breathed into me a part of your own spirit; my soul feels that influence, and becomes more sacred."⁹³

Falkland's renewed vivacity has been gained as a counterpoint to Emily's gradual decline in health, which in turn echoes the heroine's progressive fall into sin and guilt. Moreover, in addition to her decaying health, Emily also admits that her beloved son, Henry, no longer absorbs all her thoughts, and that, instead, it is Falkland who now mostly attracts her attention. Emily's gradual detachment from her son, even when she still loves him dearly, further unleashes her progressive moral decline, which will ultimately give way to her irrevocable fall from innocence.

⁹³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 70

The first encounter between Falkland and Emily Mandeville takes place in the course of an excursion to a cavernous region in the countryside, where the hostile environment surrounding the couple brings echoes of an alarming sense of danger. As if their deed had unleashed the fury of the wilderness, when the tide rises, Emily feels trapped and Falkland has to rescue her from drowning. In terms of intertextuality, this episode in Bulwer-Lytton's novella is strongly reminiscent of the passage in Poe's tale, whereby the stranger saves the Marchesa di Mentoni's child from drowning after she accidentally drops him into the Venetian canal. In both cases, these dramatic episodes echo both heroines' irretrievable fall from innocence, as if their sense of guilt had ultimately betrayed them and led them to punish themselves for their sin. However, once Falkland saves Emily from drowning in the sea, the lovers join each other in a passionate embrace – an epiphanic moment which will reverberate all through their illicit liaison. As a result of their embrace, even if Emily had lately felt enfeebled as a result of her inner guilt, she eventually awakens into passion, thus precluding her fall from grace and her christening into real existence. Falkland immediately gains insight into Emily's change when she turns and he realises that "her cheek was no longer pale."⁹⁴ Drawing on the tenets of courtly love, it is assumed, thus, that, through this epiphanic embrace, Emily Mandeville undergoes a metaphorical transformation from an idealised and unreachable woman into an actual being, thus leaving behind the qualities pertaining to a process of idealisation and gaining humanity in exchange.

In analogy with Bulwer-Lytton's passage in his novella *Falkland*, in Poe's "The Assignment," once the Marchesa di Mentoni's child is also saved from drowning and the stranger approaches her holding her child, the narrator realises that the Marchesa also undergoes a transformation, from marble to crimson, transforming her pallor pertaining to the statue of a goddess into the blushing countenance of a flesh-and-bone woman, thus remarking,

⁹⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 66.

[...] the statue has started into life! The pallor of the marble countenance, the swelling of the marble bosom, the very purity of the marble feet, we behold suddenly flushed over with a tide of ungovernable crimson.”⁹⁵

Accordingly, for both Emily Mandeville and the Marchesa di Mentoni, their illicit relationship involves their actual coming-to-life, their first real encounter with real love, even though their actions had turned them into mortal beings, thus echoing their eventual demise, as if the action of falling into the water ultimately anticipated their premature death. The encounter between Falkland and Emily Mandeville in *Falkland* will prove particularly fatal to Emily, as, even though she acknowledges succumbing to passion for the first time, her health worsens and she undergoes a process of premature aging as a result of her guilt. Conversely, Falkland gains strength and vivacity due to his attachment to Emily, and renounces his seclusion, thus returning to early visions of love and youth which he felt he had utterly lost. Similarly, in Poe’s tale “The Assignment,” the Marchesa di Mentoni, who is often compared with the goddess Aphrodite because of her beauty, also seems to gain life once the stranger touches her hand and gives her back her child. However, as the outcome of the tale shows, her deeds ultimately lead her to undergo a transformation from goddess into a mortal being. This change of a statue into a human being recalls similar transformations in the literary tradition, such as that of Galatea in the classical Greek myth of Pygmalion and that of Hermione in William Shakespeare’s romance *The Winter’s Tale*, insofar as, in the Greek myth, Aphrodite takes pity on Pygmalion, the sculptor, and turns the statue he has created, Galatea, into a woman of flesh and bone, while in the final scene of Shakespeare’s play, in Paulina’s abodes, the statue of Hermione comes to life in front of her husband, Leontes.

In both *Falkland* and “The Assignment,” both heroines, Emily Mandeville and the Marchesa di Mentoni succumb to an illicit relationship and confess their deed in a significantly similar way. In Bulwer-Lytton’s novella, despite her initial reluctance, Emily finally decides to give herself to her lover, admitting:

⁹⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Visionary (The Assignment).” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 154.

Oh Falkland! You have conquered! I am yours – yours only [...] I could restrain myself no longer; all my virtue, my pride, forsook me at once. Yes, yes, you are indeed my world. I will fly with you anywhere – everywhere.⁹⁶

In clear analogy with this passage, in Poe's tale, the Marchesa di Mentoni also surrenders to the stranger, and the narrator of the story unveils her words, confessing:

“Thou hast conquered” – she said, or the murmurs of the water deceived me – “thou hast conquered – one hour after sunrise – we shall meet – so let it be!”⁹⁷

These two scenes, the first from Bulwer-Lytton's novella and the second from Poe's tale, are sufficiently similar as to underline the remarkable intertextuality existing between both texts, describing both heroines' fall from grace and irremediable downfall as a result of their decision to succumb to illegitimate passion. Likewise, this climatic scene in both fictions necessarily brings to mind the major topic of illicitness in Arthurian chivalric romances, in particular, the love triangle established between King Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, especially in the Arthurian romances by the medieval French poet Chrétien de Troyes.⁹⁸ As nineteenth-century texts, the exclamations on behalf of Emily Mandeville in Bulwer-Lytton's novella and of the Marchesa di Mentoni in Poe's tale are also highly reminiscent of the Arthurian figure of the Lady of Shallot in the Victorian ballad of Alfred Lord Tennyson,⁹⁹ as the lady finally succumbs to temptation, and looks through the window to behold Sir Lancelot, when her act brings the curse upon her and she ultimately dies.

Likewise, drawing further on the classic features of courtly love, the encounter between lovers usually takes place in an idyllic environment in the midst of nature. In Bulwer-Lytton's novella and Poe's tale, the lovers' meeting in a natural setting, especially surrounded by water, recurs in both texts and underscores the reverberation

⁹⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 116.

⁹⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Visionary (The Assignment).” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 154.

⁹⁸ The illicit love triangle among King Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot was first mentioned in Chrétien de Troyes's old French poem *Lancelot, Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, which dates from the twelfth-century.

⁹⁹ Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote two versions of his poem “The Lady of Shallot,” which were published in 1833 and in 1842, respectively.

of their illicitness and the tragic consequences that their acts will eventually involve. These effects are particularly noticeable in respect of the process of aging of the heroes and heroines, respectively. Despite Emily Mandeville's youth, her guilt quickens her process of aging, while Falkland resumes his youthful period growing detached from his permanent isolation. Similarly, the Marchesa di Mentoni gains life, and thus mortality, as the narrator beholds her metaphorical transformation from a goddess into a human being. Her attainment of human qualities also renders her a mortal being, and thus subjected to the process of aging. Likewise, Emily's transformation becomes a fact when Falkland has some disturbing dreams about his lover whereby he witnesses her quick transition from youth to age in this manner:

He saw, as through a floating and mistlike veil, the features of Emily; but how changed! – sunken and hueless, and set in death. The dropping lip, from which there seemed to trickle a deep red stain like blood; the leadlike and lifeless eye; the calm, awful, mysterious repose which broods over the aspect of the dead.¹⁰⁰

Falkland has this premonitory vision after his illicit encounter with Emily, which underlines her fall from grace and metaphorical death, but also anticipates Emily's actual forthcoming demise. The sudden decline that Emily undergoes in terms of aging finds its counterpart in an essay that Bulwer-Lytton included in his compilation *The Student* under the title of "Infidelity in Love." In his article, Bulwer-Lytton recounts the effects that infidelity exerts on the individual through a dialogue between lovers:

'Give me, then, back,' said she, 'that which I brought to you.' And the man answered, in his vulgar coarseness of soul, 'Your fortune shall return to you.' – 'I thought not of fortune,' said the lady; 'give me back my real wealth – give me back my beauty and my youth – give me back the virginity of soul – give me back the cheerful mind, and the heart that had never been disappointed.'¹⁰¹

The description above which Bulwer-Lytton was to include in an essay of *The Student* clearly brings to mind Emily Mandeville's decline after her illicit relationship with

¹⁰⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 123.

¹⁰¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Infidelity in Love." (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I*. New York: Harper Brothers, 1836): 65.

Falkland, and by extension, the unleashing of a premature process of aging and the farewell to the ideals of youth.

Likewise, in Poe's tale, when the stranger goes back to his apartment after his encounter with the Marchesa di Mentoni on the Bridge of Sighs, he sees a portrait of Mentoni's wife, in which the stranger's guest, the narrator, observes the Marchesa's goddess-like countenance, but also the way that some melancholic mood lurks beneath her affected smile. If the Marchesa di Mentoni's countenance betrays some nostalgia, it is Emily Mandeville's declining health which mostly shows her unfathomable guilt, as Emily often feels the watchful eye of her husband on her, even though her behaviour is mostly reprimanded by her own conscience and her high moral standards. Emily Mandeville's health gradually decays to the extent that she breaks a blood-vessel as a result of the guilty feelings that she is compelled to bear. In fact, Emily's husband ultimately accuses his wife of adultery, disclosing one of the letters she addressed to her lover and giving it back to her. As a result of her husband's forceful reproach, Emily passes away, and Falkland is able to behold the transformation her countenance suffers as a result – "the changed and lifeless countenance of Emily Mandeville"¹⁰² – thus resembling the nightmarish and premonitory vision that Falkland had of his lover the night before.

Following Emily Mandeville's death, though, Falkland also suffers a transformation, as his transitory grasp on life comes to a close, falling senseless on the precise spot where his encounter with Emily had taken place the previous night. As a result of this tragic experience, given his Spanish origins, Falkland decides to accept his uncle's proposal to join him and return to Spain to fight by the side of General Riego, thus complying with his mother's wish to fight for her country. Nonetheless, Falkland's acceptance is grounded in his wish for forgetfulness and excitement, rather than out of any enthusiasm to fight for the Spanish cause. Drawing on the Byronic characterisation of the male protagonist in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Falkland's decision to take part in this battle is reminiscent of Lord Byron's concern about Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire, joining the rebel army despite his lack of military experience. In the

¹⁰² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Falkland*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2004): 126.

event, neither Falkland nor Lord Byron die on the battlefield, but Falkland is seriously injured, and even though medical aid is procured, his recovery is deemed hopeless. In clear analogy with Emily Mandeville's death, Falkland expires at the same hour she passed away – half an hour after midnight – thus underscoring the insurmountable bond that joined both lovers. Significantly enough, Falkland expires holding an open locket of dark hair and pressing it convulsively upon his chest, thus recollecting Emily and holding on to the memories of his departed lover.

Similarly, in Poe's tale "The Assigination," while the narrator is attentively listening to the stranger's soliloquy about the realm of dreams that awaits him, a page from the Mentoni's household announces the death of the Marchesa di Mentoni as a result of having committed suicide using poison. Correspondingly, when the narrator approaches the stranger he finds him lying inert, realising that the goblet from which he had been drinking also contained a poisonous solution. By means of an end filled with Shakespearean echoes, the narrator gains insight into the true nature of both lovers' assigination, of their having arranged to commit suicide and meet in the afterlife, since the stranger in Poe's tale rests assured that there exists "a land of real dreams whither I am rapidly departing."¹⁰³ In Poe's tale it is thus presumed that the stranger believes that the world of dreams is more real for him than earthly existence, given the fact that it is in this afterlife that both lovers may remain together. In this respect, the lovers in Poe's tale resort to a sort of idealism, even if this implies abandoning their earthly existence. Conversely, though, in Bulwer-Lytton's *Falkland* it is implied that Emily Mandeville's death results from her acute sense of guilt, while Falkland's demise in battle seems to respond to the action of poetic justice. Poe's tale, given its title, draws attention to the assigination that both lovers arrange, which consists in a communal suicide whereby they willingly decide to take their lives. Thus, if guilt remains a core component in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and the characters are ultimately punished as a result of their illicit behaviour, in Poe's tale the lovers take the reins of their fate and decide to follow their ideals even if this may involve relinquishing their lives.

¹⁰³ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Visionary (The Assigination)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 166.

The sense of guilt and illicitness that conditions the relationship between Falkland and Emily in Bulwer-Lytton's novella is also grounded in biographical accounts regarding Bulwer-Lytton's parental background. In particular, in his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton recalled one episode during the nine years of his parents' married life that tested Elizabeth Barbara Lytton's virtue, even though it may have been the cause of much concern in her marriage. When Elizabeth Barbara was already a married woman, she was spending some time in Brighton, when she was unexpectedly met by Tom Lowndes, brother of her former suitor, Milnes Lowndes. He had heard about the unhappiness of her marriage, and intended to offer her what Bulwer-Lytton would sarcastically call in his autobiography "the consolations of that dangerous friendship called Platonic love."¹⁰⁴ This uneasy situation for Bulwer-Lytton's mother reached its peak when her husband, General Bulwer, decided to join her in Brighton. Owing to her husband's covetous nature, Elizabeth Barbara dreaded any chance of her husband knowing about Tom Lowndes' intentions, or rather, laying hands on any of his persistent letters, and even though she was far from succumbing to any illicit liaison, on account of his insistence, she eventually felt forced to get rid of her annoying wooer. Nonetheless, this episode in his mother's life – that of a prospective illicit relationship – seemed to exert a significant impact on Bulwer-Lytton's imagination at a young age. In fact, in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Emily's husband learns about his wife's illicitness upon discovering the letters revealing the relationship between his wife and Falkland; hence, upon envisioning this twist in the plot of his novella, Bulwer-Lytton might well have well had in mind his own mother's fears of her husband's discovering the letters that Lowndes addressed to her in the course of their marriage.

If Bulwer-Lytton's novella *Falkland* underlies the author's coming to terms with the ghost of illicitness in the marriage of his parents, Poe's tale "The Assignation" can be interpreted as the author's fictionalisation of the ghost of adultery that threatened, and eventually, put an end to the marriage of his parents. If Elizabeth Barbara Lytton never succumbed to illicitness, Poe's mother, Elizabeth Poe, had to bear deliberate

¹⁰⁴ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, vol. I. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 79.

prejudices and strong accusations of adultery. An itinerant life and the burden of perpetual financial deprivation would soon exert a negative influence on David Poe, and speculation about his fate range from his death at a remarkably young age to his willing disappearance as a result of a quarrel with his wife. Although the circumstances surrounding his death or disappearance remain obscure, it has even been claimed that David Poe's sudden departure might have responded to his wife's unfaithfulness with another man. In this sense, Elizabeth Poe's third child, Rosalie, has often been the object of conjecture as to whether she was truly the child of David Poe, since biographer Kenneth Silverman argues that "the lapse of a year between David Poe's disappearance and Rosalie's birth stirred rumours in Richmond that she was Elizabeth's child not by David but by a lover."¹⁰⁵

Rosalie Poe's sense of legitimacy and respectability, and particularly, that of her mother Elizabeth Poe, who was presumed to have had an illicit relationship, became an issue of much concern for Poe. Even though Poe would often visit his sister Rosalie in Richmond, where she lived with the Mackenzies,¹⁰⁶ she would soon become a taboo issue which was to raise much distress, especially with regard to Poe's relations with his wealthy foster family, the Allans. In this respect, in a letter dated November 1824, John Allan addressed Poe's elder brother, William Henry Poe, referring to Rosalie as "half your sister,"¹⁰⁷ taking for granted that she was the daughter of a different father, and thus believing her to be illegitimate. According to Peter Ackroyd, Poe would always feel a special bond with his biological mother, and any of John Allan's hints at Rosalie's dubious origins, and therefore, Elizabeth's unfaithfulness, were regarded as most unpardonable. Due to his affluent upbringing with the Allans, Poe became especially sensitive towards issues such as legitimacy, noble origins, and ancestry, since the perpetual reminder that he was not a true part of the Allans' kith and kin would

¹⁰⁵ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ According to Dawn Sova, the Mackenzies were a wealthy family from Richmond, who adopted Poe's sister, Rosalie, even though they already had two children, John and Mary, and would have eight more children of their own. When he was a child, Edgar Allan Poe often visited their home, Duncan Lodge, which was near the home of his adoptive family, the Allans.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 24.

accompany Poe throughout his life, and would necessarily contribute to increasing his sense of estrangement.

Accordingly, Poe's tale "The Assignment," insofar as it is a story that explicitly tackles the ghost of adultery, is not only grounded in Poe's distress about illegitimacy, which menaced the respectability of his biological family, but also in the suspicion that this sense of illicitness also prevailed in such an apparently honourable household as that of the Allans. In this respect, what arguably most deeply hurt Poe at such a young age was to learn that, even though his foster father often alluded to Rosalie Poe's illegitimate origins, and thus, to Elizabeth Poe's infidelity, John Allan also had illicit relations all through his marriage to Frances Allan, to the extent that Poe even ascribed his foster mother's decline in health to John Allan's continuous infidelities. As biographer Kenneth Silverman notes, there is evidence that John Allan even fathered an illegitimate child under the name of Edwin Collier, for whom he paid his school fees for years.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, for young Poe, John Allan's subtle accusations of illegitimacy in the Poe household were difficult to bear, taking into consideration Poe's awareness of his foster father's illicit relationships and illegitimate children. In this respect, Peter Ackroyd suggests:

If then he [Poe] upbraided Allan for siring illegitimate offspring, what more natural rejoinder from Allan than that Poe's own mother was guilty of a similar sin? This is the most likely to have been the primary cause of an increasingly bitter conflict.¹⁰⁹

The imprint that these circumstances left in Poe led him to transpose them in the fiction he wrote at the time, as is the case with his early tale "The Assignment." Likewise, Poe often showed his worries to prove the honour of his biological family and defend them of any accusation. In this respect, Poe even addressed a letter, dated August 1835, to his elder brother William Henry Poe in which he stated that their father had died when he was only two years old, and that their mother had died a few weeks before. According

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 14. Biographers Arthur Hobson Quinn and Nigel Barnes also make reference to John Allan's illegitimate child, but under the name of Edward Collier.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 24.

to Dawn Sova, Poe's statement was probably a falsehood intended to protect the reputations of both his mother and sister, thus showing the special concern that Poe would always feel about this particularly private issue in his family.¹¹⁰

* * *

An analysis of the early fictions of both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe underlines significant intertextual links and brings to the fore biographical issues that conditioned their personal approach to their aging process at an already young age. The male characters in both Bulwer-Lytton's novella *Falkland* and Poe's tale "The Assigination" exemplify the tenets of knighthood personified by the figure of the knight in chivalric romances, especially through their indebtedness to ideals of greatness that turn them into knights with a specific intellectual turn of mind. As a hero, Falkland is described as unusually precocious in spite of his youth, while his seclusion and continuous pursuit of knowledge characterise him as older than his actual chronological age. The character of Falkland presents some similarities with Bulwer-Lytton himself, inasmuch as the author also spent long periods of time of his childhood and youth in the secluded environment of his mother's stately home, where he was initiated into reading and writing, and began to gain insight into his future profession as a literary man, through inheriting his grandfather's library, which mostly comprised chivalric romances and philosophical treatises. Similarly, in analogy with the Byronic stranger of his early tale "The Assigination," since his childhood, Poe gave plenty of evidence of his literary skills and his precociousness as a poet, while his foster father, John Allan, initiated him into the edifying works of classical authors and decided on the literary works that his foster son should be most encouraged to read. Likewise, at a young age, both authors gained insight into the notion of fate that would determine their lives – which also plays a pivotal role in the development of the plot of these early fictions – insofar as Bulwer-Lytton's mother chose him to be her heir at a very young age, in spite of being the

¹¹⁰ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 191.

youngest child in the family, while Poe was elected to become the foster son of the Allans, instead of any other one of his siblings, following the premature death of the author's biological mother. For better or worse, the decision of their respective parents and the subsequent responsibility they bestowed upon their sons at an early age would necessarily condition the fate of both authors and would also have an important effect on the way they would approach their lives from that turning-point in their youth.

Drawing further on tenets pertaining to courtly love and chivalric romances, Bulwer-Lytton's novella *Falkland* and Poe's tale "The Assignment" metaphorically present male models of chivalry and female prototypes of the lady in chivalric romances that underscore the parental background of both authors. Falkland is brought up in the memory of his late father and in the shadow of his uncle, who initiates him in military life. Being characterised as a soldier with an intellectual bend of mind, Falkland is reminiscent of Bulwer-Lytton himself, inasmuch as the author appeared to pay homage to the figure of his father, General Bulwer, as a military man, as well as to his maternal grandfather, Richard Warburton, as a scholar. Similarly, in Poe's tale "The Assignment," the characters of Mentoni and the Byronic stranger bring echoes of Poe's foster father, John Allan, as well as of his biological father, David Poe, inasmuch as Mentoni is characterised as severe and resentful, while the Byronic stranger, insofar as he is a great admirer of art and is in love with the Marchesa, resembles David Poe, especially owing to his bohemian way of life as an actor who fell in love with his wife-to-be while she was still married to another man. The explicit antagonism established between Mentoni and the Byronic stranger also metaphorically enacts the turning-point in terms of aging that Poe was undergoing at the time, as John Allan compelled him to leave behind his Byronic idolatry – as he took it for a sign of immaturity in his foster son – and instead, to adopt a more responsible attitude towards life. Likewise, through featuring female characters such as Emily Mandeville and the Marchesa di Mentoni, both Bulwer-Lytton's novella and Poe's tale also pay tribute to the figure of the mother, insofar as Emily's high sense of duty and responsibility is highly remindful of that of Bulwer-Lytton's mother, Elizabeth Barbara, while the Marchesa di Mentoni and her tragic end can be interpreted as Poe's personal homage to his biological mother,

Elizabeth Arnold, since, like the Marchesa in the tale, she also metaphorically transformed from a goddess in her role as a stage actress into an earthly being as a result of her premature death.

In addition, in analogy with many narratives pertaining to the tradition of courtly love, Bulwer-Lytton's early novella and Poe's tale also feature the idealised and unattainable love for a lady on the part of a knight. Likewise, the premature death of these female characters, who personify the figure of the lady in chivalric romance – Emily in *Falkland*, and the Marchesa in "The Assination" – also brings to mind the tragic biographical episode that befell both Poe and Bulwer-Lytton, when they had to face the death of their first love. The premature demise of an idealised, and unfeasible, love, involved a turning-point in the lives of both authors, as the passing of Jane Stanard for Poe and of Lucy for Bulwer-Lytton led the authors to gain insight into the reality of death and the necessity of leaving their ideals behind in their process of aging. Likewise, Jane Stanard was considerably older than Poe and was also seriously ill, while Lucy, who was also somewhat older than Bulwer-Lytton, had to leave unexpectedly and was forced into marrying someone else. In both cases, these adverse circumstances contributed to characterising the idyll as unviable, and thus, led the authors to idealise their first sentimental attachment, which, in both cases, ended in tragedy upon the premature deaths of their beloved.

Finally, also with respect to the tenets of courtly love, the relationships described in both Bulwer-Lytton's novella and Poe's tale between Falkland and Emily, as well as between the Byronic stranger and the Marchesa di Mentoni, respectively, are characterised by their unfaithful natures, as is also the case with the relationship in chivalric romances between the knight and his lady, the latter being often married to another knight. The fall from grace enacted by these literary female characters is symbolised in the fictions through the process of aging that Emily and the Marchesa undergo, which eventually lead them to their deaths. The ghost of unfaithfulness in Bulwer-Lytton's novella and of illegitimacy in Poe's tale echo biographical events with regard to their parental background, as in the course of her marriage, Bulwer-Lytton's mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, was wooed by one admirer, while, with regard to her

daughter Rosalie, Poe's mother, Elizabeth Arnold, had to bear the accusations of having given birth to an illegitimate child. Hence, the ghost of cyclical illegitimacy becomes pervasive through Poe's tale "The Assination," as the different characters, that is, the Byronic stranger, Mentoni, and the Marchesa – as fictional counterparts of David Poe, John Allan, and Elizabeth Arnold – engage in unfaithfulness; insofar as David Poe felt attracted towards Elizabeth Arnold while she was still married to her first husband, Elizabeth Arnold was accused of unfaithfulness, on the grounds that Rosalie was not considered to be the legitimate daughter of David Poe; and as John Allan, in spite of his apparent high standards of morality, was alleged to be unfaithful to his wife and to have raised some illegitimate children on his own.

In spite of the significant intertextual links between these two fictions, especially with regard to their shared characteristics pertaining to the tradition of courtly love, their emphasis on idealism, and the pervasive influence that Byron exerted on both authors, it can be argued that the differing conclusion of both narratives places emphasis on dissimilar aspects that are important to shed light on the process of aging of both authors. In Bulwer-Lytton's novella, even though the deaths of Falkland and Emily seem to respond to a tragic fate, it is implied that Emily passes away as a result of an acute feeling of guilt, while Falkland consciously takes part in a battle, aware that his life is at stake and that he is likely to die. Hence, it can be claimed that the deaths of the lovers ultimately respond to a profound feeling of culpability and a high sense of moral duty. Conversely, the deaths of the Byronic stranger and the Marchesa in Poe's tale appear instead grounded in their assination to take their own lives, thus holding on to their ideals as opposed to the reality that renders their love for each other impossible. In this respect, it can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton's early novella underscores its author's sense of ethical and moral duty, which he would envision as one of the main aims attached to his fiction, such that his high sense of responsibility as an author would eventually lead him to withdraw his novella from the publishing market due to the contemporary reviews that pointed out its presumed lack of morality. Bulwer-Lytton learnt very early from his mother that his duty took precedence over everything else, and thus, he accepted the responsibility of acting according to social conventions from

an early stage in his life, which would highly condition the way he would approach his process of aging. In contrast, Poe's early tale already unveils its author's aesthetic, rather than ethical, conception of life and his ultimate preference for idealism, ultimately interpreting the experience of aging as the struggle between the individual and the surrounding social standards, which often led him to subvert any established standards of acting his age.

Likewise, owing to Bulwer-Lytton's rather isolated upbringing and his early interest in philosophy, particularly, in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's principles of idealism, and Poe's precocious literary turn and the choice of his poetic themes, which reflected the Romantic tenets prevailing at the time, both authors showed a special preference for the philosophical theories of idealism at an early stage of their literary career. According to the precepts of idealism, all knowledge comes to us through our personal mental representation, since the mind shapes the world we perceive into space and time, so that, according to idealist principles, reality is fundamentally mentally-constructed and the phenomenal world arises from self-consciousness. Nonetheless, according to German idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte, self-consciousness is also necessarily a social phenomenon, since the basic requirement for every subject to acquire self-awareness is the existence of other rational subjects. In this respect, the conception of the world as mentally-constructed and the necessary relation with others to acquire self-consciousness underlined two sides of the spectrum for the authors at the time, since they oscillated between their own personal aspirations – their mental construct of their reality – and the determining social expectations that had been bestowed upon them – the relationship with others that would ultimately lead them to acquire a deeper sense of identity as self-conscious individuals. In this respect, this dichotomy would also mark their approach to aging at this stage of their lives, as they fluctuated between their own perceptions of aging and those that they felt required to match, and while Bulwer-Lytton mostly managed to bridge the gap between the two sides of the spectrum, for Poe, this gulf would become wider and wider as he aged, thus subverting socially-constructed standards of aging.

The significant influence that Lord Byron exerted on both authors at an early stage of their careers would also shed light on their respective processes of aging. From his foster father's perspective, Poe's continuous attraction for Romantic poetry, and especially, for Lord Byron, during his life was taken as a sign of his immaturity rather than as evidence of his literary precociousness. In this respect, the publication of Poe's first collection of poetry, with clearly Romantic and Byronic undertones, came hand-in-hand with his concern to describe himself as older than his actual chronological age, as he did when he joined the army, with no apparent reason to lie about his age. In a metaphorical way, Poe's concern to pretend to be older than he was at this stage of his life appears to underscore his anxiety about John Allan's opinion about the immature ways that seemed to characterise him. Hence, at this stage, Poe began to become aware of the social perceptions of aging as a construct, as he felt entitled to lie about his age in order to comply with the expectations that his foster father had bestowed upon him with regard to how he should act according to his age. In contrast, Bulwer-Lytton's attraction towards Lord Byron and his poetry seemed grounded in the fact that, as he stated in one essay devoted to the English bard, Bulwer-Lytton regarded Byron as a poet of 'intellectualised passion,' and thus, his fondness for the English poet was taken as a sign of Bulwer-Lytton's precociousness at an early stage of his life. Likewise, though, Bulwer-Lytton's subsequent detachment from Byronism would sanction his farewell to his youth, as he would eventually leave behind his early incursion into Romantic poetry to write prose fiction pertaining to different genres, from silver-fork fiction to metaphysical novels.



Figure 2 - Steel engraving of Poe, derivative of the Samuel Osgood portrait, and completed by John Sartain weeks after Poe's death in 1849 for inclusion in Rufus Wilmot Griswold's edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York, 1850-56). Taken from: Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 65.

Chapter Two

Coming Out in Society and the Presentation of 'the Self' in *Pelham* and "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling"

Bulwer-Lytton's early works of fiction, *Falkland* and *Pelham*, underline a significant change from idealism to empiricism which, according to Allan Conrad Christensen, seems to respond to some biographical factors taking place at the time.¹ This variation necessarily responded to Bulwer-Lytton's lonely childhood and his precocious application to metaphysical studies, together with early experiences in life such as the tragic demise of his first love and the ghost of illicitness that pervaded his parental background. Accordingly, Bulwer-Lytton's second novel, *Pelham* (1828), underscores the author's increasing concern about society and interaction with others, thus leaving behind the gloomy individualism that characterised his boyhood, and ultimately stating that the lessons of society are not necessarily debasing. This alteration from idealism to empiricism mostly responded to Bulwer-Lytton's prolonged stay in Paris, and subsequently, his period of socialising that would ultimately lead him to meet his wife. Hence, to use Allan Conrad Christensen's terms, Bulwer-Lytton gradually left behind his Byronism to re-join the human community, and following Bulwer-Lytton's traditionally-established epistemological opposition, exchanging the Cave for the Agora.²

¹ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 26.

² Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 26.

Likewise, Poe often relied on idealism as a means by which to escape the dull realities of everyday life, appealing to art as a more alluring alternative to reality. Nevertheless, as Vincent Buranelli notes, despite Poe's affiliation with the Romantic Movement and even some precepts derived from German idealism, Poe's writings were also characterised by a violent realism that necessarily reflected his personal attitude towards his overwhelming reality.³ Although Poe could be a fervent defender of idealism, as his early tale "The Assignation" asserts, he was also aware of its limitations, precisely due to the tragic events he had to undergo as an individual. In this respect, as Vincent Buranelli claims, Poe "was far advanced in his empirical knowledge of the grim legion of sepulchral terrors,"⁴ and as happened to Bulwer-Lytton, this gradual change also responded to biographical factors, which, in Poe's case, mostly responded to the awkward position he felt he occupied with respect to his foster family, and his realisation of having to leave behind courting female socialites and the alluring social position that his success in these romantic endeavours might have brought about. Poe's fluctuant transition from idealism to blatant reality is depicted in a series of social satires that he would write at this stage of his life, as is the case with "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" (1840), which tackle Poe's ultimate realisation that the social prospects he had so much coveted in his early youth would ultimately come to no avail.

A comparative analysis of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* and Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" reveals the constructed quality of socialising, and how these social conventions ultimately affect personal attitudes towards the process of aging. Along the course of these narratives, Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison undergo a series of turning-points that closely reflect those that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe had to face at this stage of their lives and that allowed them to gain insight into the counterfeited quality of socialising and the socially-constructed attitudes towards aging. The process of coming out in society, their initiation in social conventions in respect of female socialites, their stay abroad and familiarity with

³ Vincent Buranelli. *Edgar Allan Poe*. (New York: Twayne, 1961): 30.

⁴ Vincent Buranelli. *Edgar Allan Poe*. (New York: Twayne, 1961): 30.

socialising in foreign societies, their rivalry with male antagonists, and the eventual acquaintance of their respective wives endowed the literary characters of Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison – and by extension, the authors themselves, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe – with the awareness that aging was socially constructed, and urged them to act accordingly, since, as indicative of their respective authors, Henry Pelham takes advantage of these social conventions, while Patrick O'Grandison is ultimately defeated in his endeavours to excel in society.

The constructive quality of the art of socialising

This gradual transformation from idealism to empiricism that both authors seemed to undergo at a specific time in life found its counterpart in their concern about social aspirations and their role in social interactions, which marked the departure of their youth and their entrance upon adulthood. This empirical knowledge also brought with it a realisation about the artifices and duplicitous ways characterising interaction in society. In Richmond, while living with the Allans, Poe necessarily got acquainted with the ways Virginians interacted in society, and shortly after returning from England, he felt estranged in a city such as Richmond, as some of Poe's friends even considered him English. Likewise, given his particular situation as an adopted son and the span of time he had spent abroad, Poe necessarily gained insight into the need of socialising according to some established norms, thus becoming aware of the deceptive mechanisms lying behind social interaction.

Poe's awareness of the duplicitous ways at play in society is reflected in tales that have often been categorised as satire, parody, or even burlesque. In this respect, according to Charles May, in some tales, it becomes difficult to tell when Poe is being serious and when he is playing, precisely because of the duplicitous nature underlying these pieces.⁵ The irony which characterises some of Poe's tales is, for the most part, rooted in social interaction and the ways of presenting oneself and of perceiving others while socialising. In this sense, Stephen Mooney has thus described Poe's typical comic structure as,

⁵ Charles E. May. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1991): 28.

[a] progression from disguise to action in disguise, the action based upon a fundamental error in the perception of the real, which leads to the comic revelation of truth as a stripping away of appearances.⁶

As Charles May argues, some of Poe's pieces which have been traditionally acknowledged as minor in comparison with his well-known masterpieces, among them the satiric tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," also dwell upon ambiguity, thus arguing that seriousness is often merely the result of the mistaken security that one knows exactly how to act in any given situation.⁷ Hence, assuming that being tricked or deceived is an inherent part of the process of learning while interacting in society, Poe's satirical pieces draw attention towards the artificial nature and constructiveness of the act of socialising, which finds its counterpart in the exaggerated importance given to good manners and formality in these tales, thus parodying dialogues in order to lay bare the conventions whereby the presentation of 'the self' and its perception ultimately prove deceptive. In his satirical pieces, Poe thus makes use of irony, sarcasm, duplicity, exaggeration, and grotesquery to deconstruct socially-assumed certainties that are eventually revealed as merely artificial constructs.

In contrast with Kantian formal precepts, Friedrich von Schiller defined the 'play drive' as the harmonious combination of the Dionysian 'sensuous drive' – that is, of life – and the 'formal drive' – that is, the Apollonian moral order or form – so that the Promethean 'play drive' consists of living form and its object is beauty. In this sense, according to Schiller, the 'aesthetical state of mind' involves a free state of mind in which the mind has been released from all forms of compulsion and all particular determinations.⁸ In a similar way, as Charles May points out, Poe considers 'play' as "an analogue for the art work itself,"⁹ insofar as he ultimately envisions the artist as a trickster and as a figure undermining "his victim's secure sense of what is truth [...] by displacing it with an autonomous alternate reality," thus ensnaring the reader in a

⁶ Charles E. May quoting from Stephen L. Mooney's "Comic Intent in Poe's Tales: Five Criteria." *Modern Language Notes* 76 (1961): 432-434. 28.

⁷ Charles E. May. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1991): 28.

⁸ William F. Wertz, Jr. "A Reader's Guide to Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man*." *Fidelio* 14.1-2 (2005): 84.

⁹ Charles E. May. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1991): 39.

system of his own creation.¹⁰ In this sense, deconstructionist views have taken an acute interest in Poe, claiming that Poe's texts are constructed on their own means of signification. As a case in point, the readings of Poe's tale "The Purloined Letter" (1844) by Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida mostly emphasise the fact that detective Auguste Dupin's success lies in reading the signs effectively, as he manages to unravel and adopt the criminal's train of thoughts to discover the letter, while the police prove unsuccessful inasmuch as they read the signs through a system of their own. In this respect, Jacques Lacan interpreted the stolen letter in Poe's tale as a signifier,¹¹ as the letter irradiates different meanings to different characters within the system of signs around which the tale revolves.

Poe's concern about reading the signs according to the appropriately-constructed system, which he widely explored in his detective tales, is also brought to the fore in his earlier comic pieces, inasmuch as characters get to know about the way to interact in society. Poe's satirical tales thus seek to reveal a truth about the self within a constructed system of signs. In this respect, in his critical essay entitled "Satirical Poems,"¹² Poe wondered about the lack of satire in America, and conversely, about its profusion in England, thus declaring that "in America [...] the people who write are the people who read – and thus in satirising the people we satirise only ourselves."¹³ Hence, Poe's particular taste for satire seems to make up for that lack. Poe's foremost instances of satire in fiction often focused on social intercourse and the art of courtship as happens in "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" (1840) and "Three Sundays in a Week" (1841). Poe's pieces of social satire and his concern to lay bare the established conventions regulating social intercourse find their English counterpart in the silver-fork school of fiction that flourished especially between the 1820s and the 1840s and was best illustrated by the publication of novels such as Benjamin Disraeli's

¹⁰ Charles E. May. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1991): 35.

¹¹ Tony Magistrale. *Student Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. (London: Greenwood, 2001): 124.

¹² Edgar Allan Poe. "Satirical Poems." (J.A. Harrison. Ed. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. XII: Literary Criticism, Part IV*. New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1902): 107-110. First published in the *Broadway Journal* on 15th March 1845.

¹³ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 215.

Vivian Grey (1826), and especially, Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828). Silver-fork novels mostly portrayed the conduct and manners of the fashionable aristocratic set, revealing their secrets and concerns about how to act appropriately in society. Nevertheless, silver-fork novels and the aristocratic mannerisms that they often depicted became an increasing source of parody and satire as soon as the middle-class tastes began to dominate society.¹⁴

In this sense, even if Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* arose as a leading exponent of silver-fork fiction, it was gradually considered a satire about fashionable life, even on behalf of its author. In fact, according to Allan Conrad Christensen, not long after the success of his silver-fork novel, Bulwer-Lytton "began to associate the attitudes he had celebrated in *Pelham* with his own immaturity,"¹⁵ thus stating that his novel *Pelham* ultimately sanctioned his departure from youth. Similarly, James Campbell also claims that Bulwer-Lytton envisioned his silver-fork novel as a way "to show how character can be redeemed through the proper use of worldly experience, growing gradually wiser by learning from his youthful foibles."¹⁶ *Pelham* thus underscores how the self accommodates in the world and grows up through social interaction. In this respect, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton's silver-fork novel dwells upon society as a stage in which each individual is required to play a role, thus taking for granted that society assigns a value to all individuals and things, and consequently, these acquire a specific significance according to the established social system. In Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* – through the use of make-up, clothes, and social conventions – individuals, like actors, step on to the social stage and present themselves in society, while others perceive them, make a judgement, and are often deceived by first impressions. Social intercourse is thus perceived as a game of make-believe and is endowed with a significantly theatrical nature, as partakers play the role they have been assigned in society and observers categorise them accordingly.

¹⁴ Maureen Moran. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. (London: Continuum, 2006): 95.

¹⁵ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 54.

¹⁶ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 27.

Nevertheless, despite the satirical and even light-hearted tone Bulwer-Lytton's silver-fork novel might display at some points, its protagonist, Henry Pelham bears some resemblance to Bulwer-Lytton, as he often reveals features of the author's own character in youth. In this sense, to use Richard Cronin's words, *Pelham* can be regarded as one of the most complete exponents of the nineteenth-century fashionable novel, insofar as its protagonist mimics the dashing effrontery of its own writer, and the talents of the hero seem scarcely distinguishable from those of the novelist.¹⁷ Bulwer-Lytton's novel can thus be regarded as particularly self-conscious, as it draws on significant biographical episodes of his youth. In analogy with Henry Pelham, who gains increasing recognition in his coming-out in society due to his wit and manners, it was through *Pelham* that Bulwer-Lytton also began to attract popularity and critical acclaim as a writer.

The biographical undertones that underlie Bulwer-Lytton's novel can best be appreciated through the process of aging that Henry Pelham undergoes as a result of his interaction in society. Despite gaining expertise in the ways of social interaction and aristocratic values, he also gradually gains insight into the emptiness and trivialities characterising his class. Hence, Henry Pelham gradually moves, to use Al-Yasin's words, "from the aristocratic patrician stage to the Utilitarian stage of Bentham and Mill,"¹⁸ thus acquiring the rigorousness of purpose that has been often associated with the rising middle classes. In this respect, as Al-Yasin further observes, through Henry Pelham's apprenticeship, Bulwer-Lytton establishes a distinction between the merely 'fashionable' gentleman and the 'true' gentleman.¹⁹ Following Bulwer-Lytton's didactic vein, which pervades in most of his prefaces and whereby he unveiled the ultimate purpose of his novels, in the preface to the 1840 edition of *Pelham*, Bulwer-Lytton admitted that his novel developed from a boyish attempt entitled "Memoirs of a

¹⁷ Richard Cronin. "Bulwer, Carlyle, and the Fashionable Novel." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 44.

¹⁸ N. Al-Yasin. *Imagining the Aristocracy: the Idea of the Nation in the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (East Anglia, University of East Anglia, PhD dissertation, 1997): 65.

¹⁹ N. Al-Yasin. *Imagining the Aristocracy: the Idea of the Nation in the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (East Anglia, University of East Anglia, PhD dissertation, 1997): 85.

Gentleman,” and that its main purpose was to prove “that the lessons of society do not necessarily corrupt, and that we may be both men of the world, and even, to a certain degree, men of pleasure, and yet be something wiser – nobler – better.”²⁰ In this sense, Henry Pelham exemplifies a sort of social accommodation that, as Robin Gilmour asserts, comes between the aristocracy and the middle classes,²¹ featuring a hero that gradually moves from pretension to substance, even sharing some of the entrepreneurial spirit that characterised the middle classes. Because of his moral and philanthropic features, as a gentleman, Henry Pelham shares the pedigree of the aristocratic gentry without being completely aristocratic. In this sense, as Al-Yasin argues, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel brings to life “a chivalrous gentleman who moves in the world but is not corrupted by it, who learns from his follies and who is prepared to reform,”²² thus uniting an aristocratic birth with an industrial bent of mind. In this respect, Henry Pelham seems to emulate Bulwer-Lytton himself, since in his highly-acclaimed book *Self-Help* (1859), Samuel Smiles made an explicit reference to Bulwer-Lytton as an example of an aristocrat who, in spite of his privileged social position, decided to choose industriousness and continuous labour to succeed in his literary career.²³ Moreover, this duality characterising Henry Pelham’s character is also highly evocative of that of Bulwer-Lytton, insofar as, in his father’s biography, Robert Lytton referred to Bulwer-Lytton’s character in this way:

The airs of indifference and frivolity assumed by him in his Pelham days were not merely literary artifices; they were partly the devices of a shy nature to protect from unsympathetic notice its own sensitive intensity. [...] He had a temperament naturally joyous and buoyant: but its natural buoyancy had been considerably subdued by an early sorrow so acutely felt that the traces of it were never wholly effaced.²⁴

²⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Preface to the 1840 edition.” *Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): x.

²¹ Robin Gilmour. *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981): 2.

²² N. Al-Yasin. *Imagining the Aristocracy: the Idea of the Nation in the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (East Anglia, University of East Anglia. PhD dissertation. 1997): 104.

²³ Samuel Smiles. *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct*. (Peter W. Sinnema. Ed. Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2002).

²⁴ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 3.

Judging from his words, Robert Lytton thus claimed that his father's personality was often subjected to periods of excitement and melancholy alike at that stage in his life.

Likewise, as Robert Lytton further points out in the biography of his father, it is important to notice that it was also at this time that Bulwer-Lytton decided to stop writing his autobiography, thus being mostly limited to the portrayal of his childhood and youth. Robert Lytton would justify his father's decision in his mature days, contending that "men, as they approach the age when to look back is more natural than to look forward, instinctively recall the most trivial impressions of their youth, or childhood, with greater pleasure than the most important achievements of their middle life."²⁵ In an essay he wrote in his late years, Bulwer-Lytton himself would claim that "it is noticeable how intuitively in age we go back with strange fondness to all that is fresh in the earliest dawn of youth."²⁶ Nonetheless, another reason that may shed light on why Bulwer-Lytton decided to leave his autobiography unfinished may involve the fact that he found it difficult to put into words the beginning of a period in his life that would bring him the deepest joy, but also, the most poignant of sorrows: that of meeting his future wife, Rosina Doyle Wheeler.²⁷ As evidence of Bulwer-Lytton's apparent inability – or, simply, downright unwillingness – to continue writing his memoirs at this stage, his son Robert Lytton, who took over his father's biography, stated:

Here, at any rate, he threw aside the record of his reminiscences. Not but that he meant to continue it. Time after time, he took it up again with that object. Time after time, again he put it down untouched. And so years passed away, adding much to the experiences of his life, but nothing to his written account of them.²⁸

²⁵ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 5.

²⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "On the Increased Attention to Outward Nature in the Decline of Life." *Caxtoniana: A Series of Essays on Life, Literature, and Manners.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1864): 16.

²⁷ Rosina Doyle Wheeler (1802-1882), who, upon marrying Edward Bulwer-Lytton, would become Rosina Bulwer Lytton, was the daughter of the advocate of women's rights, Anna Wheeler, and of the Reverend Nicholas Milley Doyle, a Church of Ireland clergyman, Rector of Newcastle, County Tipperary, Ireland. She wrote and published novels, volumes of essays, volumes of letters, and her autobiographical account of her commitment to an asylum in her book *A Blighted Life* (1880).

²⁸ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 5.

Even though Bulwer-Lytton decided not to divulge the following episode of his life in his autobiography, it can be argued that his novel *Pelham* became a cathartic attempt at conjuring a fictionalised version of the author's period of socialising in his youth, which would ultimately lead him to meet his prospective wife.

In the arms of female socialites: Lady Roseville, Lady Caroline Lamb, Mistress Tracle, and Sarah Elmira Royster

As significant turning-points in the lives of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, through a period of socialising and interacting with friends and acquaintances, both authors had affairs with different female socialites, such as Caroline Lamb and Sarah Elmira Royster respectively, which would leave a significant imprint in their lives and would inspire them to write fictions about social life and the deceitful quality that it may bring along with it. At a personal level, these affairs would exert a significant influence on the authors to the extent that could be identified as turning-points that marked the departure of youth and their entrance upon adulthood. Likewise, these personal episodes would ultimately become fictionalised through satire and even cynicism in their respective fictions, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* and Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," through the portrayal of female socialites such as Lady Roseville and Miss Tracle.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham*, its main character comes out in society and meets different female socialites, in particular, Lady Roseville, with whom Pelham learns about the ways to rise in society. In her book about silver-fork fiction, Alison Adburgham defines Lady Roseville in Bulwer-Lytton's novel as a character that is often portrayed in fashionable novels, inasmuch as she is a mature woman, who, enticing a young man to fall in love with her, also contributes to initiate him in the way to behave in society.²⁹ Being a socialite, a mature woman, and a coquette by nature, Lady Roseville significantly brings to mind Bulwer-Lytton's own initiation in society on behalf of Lady Caroline Lamb. Indeed, it is significant to notice that the last episode

²⁹ Alison Adburgham. *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1983).

that Bulwer-Lytton committed to memory in his autobiography was his early infatuation with the socialite Lady Caroline Lamb. In his autobiographical writings, Bulwer-Lytton admits having met her for the first time during his childhood, when he had written some poems for her, and, thankful for his verses, she had invited him home and had painted his portrait in which he appeared as a child seated on a rock in the midst of the sea, somewhat reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich's romantic landscape picture *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818).³⁰ In this respect, Caroline Lamb already initiated Bulwer-Lytton into romantic tenets and the Byronic attributes that he would so much covet in his youth. However, it was in his early twenties, when Bulwer-Lytton spent a period of time in London and Broadstairs with his mother Elizabeth Barbara, that he met Caroline Lamb again and, before returning to Cambridge to pursue his studies, he was invited to spend some days at her place in Bocket, which was situated a few miles away from Knebworth House, his mother's stately home.

In his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton would describe his second encounter with Caroline Lamb later in life as an occasion fated to have an important effect on his life and mark his entrance upon adulthood.³¹ While Lady Caroline was a mature woman between thirty and forty years of age, even if she was alleged to look younger, Bulwer-Lytton had scarcely turned twenty at the time, and, at such an impressionable age, he was soon struck by Lady Caroline's charms and her remarkable gifts at conversing and socialising. Conversely, though, Bulwer-Lytton would also regard her as coquettish and artful, insofar as he would soon take notice of Lady Caroline's frequent changes of mood, as her talk moved swiftly from utter sentimentality to profound reflection, and accordingly, Bulwer-Lytton would ultimately consider her "a creature of caprice, and impulse, and whim, [since] her manner, her talk, and her character shifted their colours

³⁰ Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) was a nineteenth-century German Romantic painter, whose primary interest as an artist was the contemplation of nature, aiming to convey a subjective and emotional response to the natural world. Owing to a growing disillusionment with materialistic society, painters such as Caspar David Friedrich, J.M.W. Turner, and John Constable sought to depict nature as a divine creation and to direct the viewer's gaze towards its metaphysical dimension. Friedrich's paintings often make use of the *Rückenfigur*; a person seen from behind who contemplates the view and experiences the sublime potential of nature.

³¹ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 328.

as rapidly as those of a chameleon.”³² In fact, as Robert Lytton admits in his father’s biography, in her role as socialite, Caroline Lamb seemed to take delight in bringing men to her feet, and then, hasten to make new conquests once she believed she had achieved her initial purpose, thus personifying the role of female socialite.

In Robert Lytton’s view, although his father was highly flattered by Lady Caroline’s attentions at the time, her experience as a mature woman and her whimsical nature, for the most part, exerted a negative effect on Bulwer-Lytton’s self-esteem at such a young age. In this respect, it can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton fictionalised his affair with Caroline Lamb in his silver-fork novel *Pelham*, especially, as will be shown, in the way their relationship came to an end, which bears a close resemblance with the fictionalised portrait of the end of the affair between Henry Pelham and Lady Roseville in his novel. The relationship between Bulwer-Lytton and Caroline Lamb came to a close at a ball, at which both were frequent guests, when Bulwer-Lytton realised that Lady Caroline appeared to be closely attached to a new handsome guest, Russell, whom she was said to have known for a long time, and it was clear that he was becoming her new focus of attention.

As Robert Lytton recounts, in a letter addressed to a close friend in his youth, Bulwer-Lytton unravelled the outcome of his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, admitting that, once recovered from this early disappointment, he realised that their relationship had mostly been the result of imagination rather than of actual affection. In fact, it seems that what had truly intrigued Bulwer-Lytton was Lady Caroline’s former acquaintance with Lord Byron, with whom she had become very close for nearly three years, and being a fervent admirer of the English bard in his youth, Bulwer-Lytton felt flattered for the attentions that Lady Caroline procured him, especially, as he felt that he had the chance to emulate her illustrious former suitor. As evidence of this, it was when he realised that her new pretender, Russell, was wearing the ring that Lord Byron had given to Lady Caroline – which she only allowed those she loved best to wear – that Bulwer-Lytton decided to put an end to the affair. As recollected in his personal

³² Quoted in Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, vol. I. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 328.

memoirs, Bulwer-Lytton admitted that this symbolic event allowed him to see Lady Caroline in her true light, as “chiefly the creature of vanity and imagination,”³³ and bade her farewell on account of gaining insight into her truly unfeeling nature and the idealised portrait he had made of her.

Following the end of his affair with Caroline Lamb, Bulwer-Lytton's conceit and his turn for daydreaming, which had characterised the years of his youth, appeared to come to halt, and, obliged to contemplate his new bleak reality, he was to become more ironic, and even more cynical, as the character of Henry Pelham would ultimately reflect. However, this transitional period, comprising the end of Bulwer-Lytton's affair with Lady Caroline and his first visit to Paris after the event, would first give way to a volume of poetry entitled *Weeds and Wildflowers* (1826) that Bulwer-Lytton only intended for private circulation and contained some allusions to Lady Caroline Lamb, which, as Robert Lytton would interpret, mostly revealed that his father regarded his attachment to Lady Caroline as eminently capricious. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton's poetic tribute to Caroline Lamb ultimately elicited two letters from her, which unveiled important aspects about the change that Bulwer-Lytton's personality seemed to be undergoing at the time. In this respect, in the first of her letters, Caroline Lamb reaffirmed Bulwer-Lytton's mournful fondness for Lord Byron, while in her second letter she detected an unusual liking for wit and satire, which Bulwer-Lytton appeared to have acquired lately. Accordingly, Caroline Lamb had noticed a significant change that had befallen Bulwer-Lytton at the time, observing that his former melancholic condition had transformed into a rather cynical mood, which the author would mostly exploit in his novel *Pelham*. As evidence of this, Caroline Lamb wrote to Bulwer-Lytton in the following terms:

Pray write to me as you wrote then; even though your opinion of me, and affection – boyish affection – be utterly changed. Your letters were then beautiful and soothing. I detest wit, and humour, and satire. I fear you are now

³³ Quoted in Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol.I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 336

given to all this, and have lost the freshness of youthful feeling, the noble sentiments, and the warm vivid hopes and aspirations of an uncorrupted heart.³⁴

Judging from her words, Caroline Lamb noticed the change that Bulwer-Lytton had undergone, thus underlining the alteration that had made him leave behind the introspection and retreat that had characterised his *Falkland* days in order to begin a period of intense interaction and socialising, which characterised the way of life of his new literary hero, Henry Pelham, who considers interaction with others a way of improving oneself. In fact, Sibylla Jane Flower described Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* as "a delightful satire, witty and urbane, on the fashionable world of London and Paris in the 1820s [as] the pages sparkle with a gaiety and humour which rarely reappear in Bulwer's later works,"³⁵ precisely as *Pelham* reflects Bulwer-Lytton's coming out in society in his youth, as the author's bent of mind at the time significantly differed from the introspection of his childhood and early youth.

Drawing on biographical accounts, the portrayal of the character of Lady Roseville in Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* particularly underscores the influence of the author's early attachment to Lady Caroline Lamb. In the novel, soon after leaving Cambridge, Pelham is invited to visit Sir Lionel Garrett at his country seat, and it is in the course of this visit that he becomes acquainted with Lady Roseville, who, in clear resemblance to Lady Caroline Lamb, is portrayed as a wealthy woman of outstanding beauty and exquisite manners, somewhat older than Pelham, and highly praised in the circles of the upper classes as a true-born socialite. Nonetheless, as also happened to Bulwer-Lytton with respect to Lady Caroline Lamb, Pelham gradually gains insight into the real nature of Lady Roseville, ultimately concluding that she "was of a nature exactly contrary to what was generally believed [even adding that] she was too well versed in the arts of concealment."³⁶ Hence, resembling Lady Caroline Lamb, due to her coquettish and impetuous nature, Lady Roseville's flirtation with Pelham is rapidly

³⁴ Quoted in Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, vol.II. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 29.

³⁵ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton*. (Aylesbury: Shire, 1973): 13.

³⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 12.

brought to an end, and his apparent nonchalance at the end of their affair seems to prove that, rather than responding to real affection, his relationship with Lady Roseville was in truth aimed at his being initiated into the appropriate social circles and at becoming familiar with the conventions regulating social interactions. In fact, Pelham ultimately perceives that Lady Roseville, owing to her arts of socialising, also excels in the arts of deceit, and resembling the outcome of Bulwer-Lytton's attachment to Lady Caroline Lamb, it is also at a ball where Pelham realises that Lady Roseville's attention is gradually drawn from himself to his rival Reginald Glanville, hence also gaining insight, as Bulwer-Lytton himself did with regard to Caroline Lamb, into the capricious and duplicitous nature characterising female socialites. Likewise, just as Bulwer-Lytton's attention was also ultimately drawn to Caroline Lamb's more apparently modest protégée, Rosina Doyle Wheeler, who would ultimately become his wife, in the novel, Pelham finally sets eyes on Ellen Glanville's unpretentious ways as he grows gradually detached from Lady Roseville's duplicitous nature.

If, in his youth, Bulwer-Lytton was closely attached to the socialite Lady Caroline Lamb, Poe also had an early relationship with a lady belonging to a wealthy family whose influence would have an important effect on Poe's process of aging and would extend to the very last days of his life. In fact, Poe's relationship with Sarah Elmira Royster in his youth bears close resemblance with that of Bulwer-Lytton and Lady Caroline Lamb, inasmuch as Bulwer-Lytton addressed some poems to Lady Caroline Lamb, and so did Poe with regard to his socialite friend, while Lady Caroline Lamb produced a sketch of young Bulwer-Lytton, and Poe also drew his socialite on a canvas. Likewise, owing to the playful ways of these female socialites, the early affairs of both authors ended in failure, except to challenge their vanity and prompt them to produce their early poems and satirical pieces of fiction in which the authors bid their beloved farewell along with their youth. In this respect, it can be argued that Poe's early satirical tales – in particular "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" – are grounded in his infatuation with a beloved female socialite and his cynical transposition of this personal episode into fiction.

As biographer Peter Ackroyd points out, soon after his idolised Helen Stanard passed away, Poe became closely attached to Sarah Elmira Royster,³⁷ who lived next to the Allans' house in Richmond, in analogy with Lady Caroline Lamb with regard to Bulwer-Lytton, who also lived near Knebworth House. Poe and Sarah Elmira Royster used to meet each other in her house under the close supervision of her parents, and despite their ostensible youth, it seems a fact that they soon became engaged to be married. Nonetheless, given Sarah Elmira Royster's affluent position and her condition as a socialite, social prejudices were to play a major role in their relationship, especially insofar as her father objected to their marriage, but also owing to the fact that Poe himself might have envisioned his marriage as beneficial for his plans to become a potential heir to the Allans' estate and a prospective member of the upper social circles in Richmond. In this respect, if Bulwer-Lytton's main attraction towards Lady Caroline Lamb mostly responded to her being a renowned socialite, Poe's proposal to Sarah Elmira Royster might also have been due to reasons related to improving his social status, since, as biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn claims, Poe "probably had some idea of profiting by the marriage."³⁸ Nonetheless, as opposed to Bulwer-Lytton, who finally deserted Lady Caroline Lamb on account of her deceitful nature, in Poe's case his engagement to Sarah Elmira Royster concluded abruptly as a result of her family's objections, which, according to Arthur Hobson Quinn, may have been grounded in the fact that Poe had neither profession nor any brilliant prospects.³⁹ Despite the fact that Poe never married Sarah Elmira Royster, critics such as Dawn Sova, maintain that she would always be fond of Poe,⁴⁰ since, later in life, when she was a wealthy widow, she became engaged to him again, although she would meet her family's objections to their marriage once more, this time on account of her children, who disapproved of Poe on financial grounds.

³⁷ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 23.

³⁸ Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 629.

³⁹ Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 93.

⁴⁰ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 214.

In analogy with Caroline Lamb, who took notice of Bulwer-Lytton's change in his youth from a melancholic disposition to a rather cynical mood, Sarah Elmira Royster would also draw attention to Poe's dual character in his youth. In the course of a conversation with Edward Valentine, years after Poe had passed away, Sarah Elmira Royster shared her memories and described him in the following terms:

He was a beautiful boy – Not very talkative. When he did talk though he was pleasant but his general manner was sad [...] He had strong prejudices. Hated anything coarse and unrefined. Never spoke of his parents. He was kind to his sister as far as in his power. He was as warm and zealous in any cause he was interested in, very enthusiastic and impulsive.⁴¹

Judging from her words, Sarah Elmira Royster was able to perceive an apparent double personality in Poe, depicting him as sad and enthusiastic, and placing great emphasis on Poe's total distaste for vulgarity and his considerable concern about social distinction. Through Sarah Elmira Royster's memories, it is thus possible to assert that, in his youth, Poe was well aware of the importance attached to establishing social connections and presenting himself in society in the appropriate way. However, owing to the fact that his prospects to improve his social status would ultimately lead him nowhere, in his life but especially in his fiction, Poe would often show scorn for social pretentiousness and for his own concern to improve his status, as his tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" ultimately displays.

As happened to Bulwer-Lytton, who, after the end of his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, published a collection of poetry with some clear biographical references to their attachment, once his affair with Sarah Elmira Royster had come to a close, Poe would also publish a collection of poetry entitled *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827),⁴² with poems that lament the end of the poet's youth and underscore Poe's feelings of

⁴¹ Edward Valentine. "Conversation with Mrs. Shelton at Mr. Smith's corner 8th and Leigh Streets, 19th November 1875." *Appleton's Journal. New Series IV* (1878): 428-429. Quoted in Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 91. The manuscript of this conversation is still nowadays located in the Valentine Museum in Richmond and is dated 1875.

⁴² Also published in an issue of the *North American* on 15th September 1827.

despondence at the end of his relationship with Sarah Elmira Royster.⁴³ Through these poems, it is possible to detect the dual character in Poe that Sarah Elmira Royster could identify, presenting him, on the one hand, as sad and mournful for the vanished love, and on the other hand, as deeply concerned about the loss of social prospects. In this respect, as Dawn Sova contends, most biographers claim that Poe's poem "Song" was addressed to Sarah Elmira Royster on account of the breaking of their engagement and of her family's machinations to get her to marry another man.⁴⁴ In this poem, the poetic persona confesses having seen a bride blushing on her wedding day, and attributes this physical symptom to "maiden shame,"⁴⁵ as the poetic persona, through a resentful tone, ultimately blames the bride for having disregarded her former pledge to the poet. If Poe's poem "Song" echoes its author's bitterness at this time of his life, his poem "The Happiest Day," also included in the same collection of poetry, displays the poet's resentment as a result of having been deprived of the social prospects and privileged status that he might have attained, especially through his marriage to Sarah Elmira Royster. In this respect the first two stanzas of this poem run as follows:

The happiest day the happiest hour
My sear'd and blighted heart hath known,
The highest hope of pride, and power,
I feel hath flown.

Of power! Said I? Yes! I ween
But they have vanish'd long alas!
The visions of my youth have been –

⁴³ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 104.

⁴⁴ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 224.

⁴⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. "Song (I saw thee on thy bridal day)." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. I: Poems*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969): 65.

But let them pass.⁴⁶

The poetic persona thus laments the transient quality of happiness, making explicit reference to the loss of pride and power that he had coveted, and crying over the lack of social excellence and distinction that he had expected to achieve and ultimately had to leave behind together with the hopes of his youth. Poe's literary compositions at the time thus reflected the deep concern about social status that Sarah Elmira Royster's memories identified in his character as a young man.

In particular, though, Poe's bitterness for his unsuccessful attempts to become a member of a distinguished social set found its literary reflection in the social satires and comic grotesques that he published at the time. As a remarkable sardonic piece, Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" comments on the absurdity and irrationality that may befall an individual in his obsessive concern to rise in society. However, despite its apparent light-hearted tone, it also comprises some particulars that appear to be highly biographical, especially with regard to Poe's liaison with a female socialite, his will to rise in society, and the ultimate unfavourable outcome of his venture. Poe's tale consists of a social satire recounting the romantic and ironic competition between an Irish baronet, Sir Patrick O'Grandison – who is also the narrator of the story and is somehow reminiscent of Poe – and his opponent – a stylish Frenchman named Maiter-di-dauns – for the love of a wealthy widow who lives nearby and responds to the name of Mistress Tracle. From the beginning, Sir Patrick presents himself as a member of the upper-classes, admitting that he has recently been granted his noble title which distinguishes him as a member of the aristocracy. Nonetheless, despite his efforts at highlighting his exquisite manners and social distinction, Sir Patrick's Irish brogue and blatant snobbery necessarily betray him as not exactly part of an illustrious social set. Sir Patrick is thus portrayed as a character who aspires to become part of the social elite through pretence and make-believe, since he does not quite belong to that particular set of the social spectrum.

⁴⁶ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Happiest Day." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. I: Poems*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969): 81.

Like Poe at the time, Sir Patrick is also highly concerned about rising in society and attempts to consolidate his privileged position through his attachment to a female socialite, Mistress Tracle, whom he describes as his “own nixt door neighbour, [...] and a most particuller frind and acquaintance.”⁴⁷ Sir Patrick’s attraction towards the widow thus responds to his will to be praised and admired in society, believing that courting a socialite may grant him an outstanding social position. Drawing on biographical accounts, Poe would also envision his relationship with Sarah Elmira Royster as a way to improve his social prospects, and his acquaintance with this female socialite – who also happened to be his neighbour – presents many points in common with the courting of Sir Patrick and Mistress Tracle in Poe’s satirical piece. In fact, Sir Patrick ironically recounts how Mistress Tracle would look through her window using a spy-glass and would talk to him in order to praise him for his civil and gentle manners. Similarly, at the time of his relationship with Elmira, while Poe lived in Richmond, a telescope stood on the porch of the Allans’ home⁴⁸ and Poe would often look through it, developing his aptitude as an observer whereby he would ultimately become acquainted with his next-door neighbour, Sarah Elmira Royster. In the same way as Poe paid frequent visits to his female socialite in her house, in Poe’s tale, Sir Patrick also courts Mistress Tracle in her elegant home, while she plays the piano, as Sarah Elmira Royster – who was very fond of music – also used to do. Likewise, just as Poe had to submit to Sarah Elmira Royster’s giving in to her family’s pressures to marry another man, in this satirical piece, Sir Patrick’s intentions also come to no avail, since, as will be shown, in his competition with his French rival for the love of the wealthy widow, both are eventually caught in self-delusion.

⁴⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 464.

⁴⁸ Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 93-94.

Socialising abroad: London and Paris

In their early youth, both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe spent significant spans of time living abroad, thus making themselves familiar with a foreign culture and having to learn the ways to interact in a different sort of environment. Echoes of their respective stays in a foreign country are brought to the fore in their literary fictions depicting social life, and in this respect, it can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton's stay in Paris inspired him to write some passages of his novel *Pelham*, while the effect of the long period that Poe spent in England and Scotland in the early years of his youth would also be transposed in some of his tales. In fact, in Poe's satirical piece "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," the two rivals that compete for the love of Mistress Tracle are of foreign origin, inasmuch as the narrator is Irish, while his opponent is of French descent, and both strive to find their way in a foreign environment, even if their actions finally do not meet the expected end.

At the very onset of Poe's tale, through the boastful display of his visiting card, Sir Patrick O'Grandison unveils that his place of residence is located at 39 Southampton Row in Russell Square in London, which was also the address of the rented house where the Allans lived during their stay in London.⁴⁹ By Poe's insertion of this biographical reference in his tale, the author showed that he was unveiling significant personal aspects within this piece, in spite of its stressed ironic tone. In fact, in 1815 Poe left America with his foster family to spend five years of his early adolescence in Great Britain, where he would be educated in different schools in England and Scotland. In this foreign context, Poe became familiar with the importance attached to accent and manners as indicative of social class, and also became used to the appropriate ways of interacting in society as sanctioned by assumed social regulations. In this respect, Sir Patrick O'Grandison, in his tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," makes constant use of grandiloquent expressions and exaggerated social mannerisms that turn him into a grotesque character, assuming that 'manners maketh man' and laying bare the constructive quality of the appropriate conduct to rise in

⁴⁹ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 17.

society. This theatrical component characterising Sir Patrick in Poe's satirical tale underpins the author's awareness of the importance attached to social praise, while it also underscores the author's disapproval of what he perceives as giving overstated prominence to public acclaim. However, Poe's social upbringing in a highly stratified society would exert a deep influence on him, and he would return to America with this bent of mind, even finding himself at odds to re-adapt himself to the American ways in his own homeland, but with the firm aspiration to become a Southern gentleman.

Like Poe, Bulwer-Lytton would also live abroad and become acquainted with the social ways in a foreign country, and this experience abroad at a young age would pave the ground for the writing of his silver-fork novel *Pelham*. In fact, during the years 1825 and 1826, Bulwer-Lytton travelled to Paris, spending some intervals in Faubourg St. Germain, which at the time became especially known for being considered a quarter where the wealthy and the stylish often resided, and it was there that he became particularly acquainted with the Cunninghams, who were one of the first English families to visit Paris after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815. At the time, Bulwer-Lytton felt closely attached to Mrs Cunningham, who was mostly responsible for introducing him into the ways of Parisian society, and the difference in their ages, as Bulwer-Lytton was ostensibly younger, gave the impression that they were related to one another, as if they were mother and son. As a matter of fact, in the absence of his own mother, Bulwer-Lytton found in Mrs Cunningham an alternative mother figure, whose portrait would ultimately be fictionalised in his novel *Pelham*. In this sense, as Robert Lytton admits in the biography of his father, when in Bulwer-Lytton's novel Henry Pelham refers to his mother and her teachings about the ways of society, the reader should interpret Mrs Pelham as Mrs Cunningham's fictional *alter ego* during Bulwer-Lytton's stay in Paris.⁵⁰

Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* mostly reflects the author's coming out in society during the course of his visits to Mrs Cunningham in Paris, especially, taking into consideration that the novel was published only three years after that stage in

⁵⁰ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 21.

Bulwer-Lytton's life. Being in his early twenties, Bulwer-Lytton felt particularly exposed as well as attracted to acquiring the necessary social ways that would grant him the right to be accepted in the elitist social circles. Feeling estranged and away from home, this became especially relevant as, despite his aristocratic origins, he was an Englishman in Paris, and thus, he felt the need to adapt to the ways that prevailed in a foreign country. Being introduced to these ways and attempting to emulate the behaviour he thought would be socially praised was perceived as a necessary step towards being accepted in these social circles. As evidence of this, in his biography of his father, Robert Lytton refers to the description Mrs Cunningham's daughter would write about Bulwer-Lytton, which clearly resembles his character Henry Pelham, insofar as his manners and social intercourse are concerned. In fact, after stating that Bulwer-Lytton was constantly at their house when he stayed in Paris, Mrs Cunningham's daughter refers to him in this way:

He was at that time particularly sensitive to the praise or blame of the world. He adopted a style of dress and manner different to that of other people; and he liked to be noted for it. My mother often laughed at him for this vanity, and his 'beautiful curls' were a standing joke amongst his friends.⁵¹

As the quotation above asserts, Bulwer-Lytton thus felt particularly concerned about taking good care of his appearance as well as the way of presenting himself in society. A marked obsession with clothes and the peculiar way he arranged his hair, as Mrs Cunningham's daughter describes above, also characterises Henry Pelham's special concern to give a good impression when he comes out in society. In both cases, this physical apparel is accurately designed so as to cause the intended effect on the rest of those individuals taking part in social gatherings.

According to Leslie Mitchell, Bulwer-Lytton had already made a reputation as a dandy and a wit, being a frequent visitor at Lady Blessington's Salon at Gore House in Kensington, soon after finishing his studies at Cambridge.⁵² However, his deep concern

⁵¹ Quoted in Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, vol.II. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 22.

⁵² Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 87.

about appearance went beyond mere vanity, as taking care of one's looks ultimately concealed a more important aim, namely, his being accepted in determined social circles. Hence, external appearance and social status seemed to go hand-in-hand. Nonetheless, one's attire could even reveal something else, since, to use Leslie Mitchell's words, "exterior elegance reflected an interior elegance of the soul,"⁵³ thus showing Bulwer-Lytton's aesthetic theory about his looks being a reflection of himself. In this respect, in an entry to his journal dated 1838, Bulwer-Lytton stated: "God gave my soul an exterior abode and the very fact there is a soul within the shell, makes me think the shell not to be neglected."⁵⁴ In the creation of his character Henry Pelham, Bulwer-Lytton endowed aesthetics with an important ethical component, well aware that the external apparel revealed information about the individual's inner self.

Bulwer-Lytton's deep concern about his looks at the time was also rooted in the prevailing cult of the dandy, which, according to Leslie Mitchell, also came hand-in-hand with a prominent cult of youth that prevailed at the time.⁵⁵ A deep interest in aesthetics also necessarily brought about a particular concern about aging and the fear of growing old within a social environment in which one's looks seem to be taken for one's own status and identity. In this sense, in a letter addressed to his friend Lady Blessington, dated 1833, when Bulwer-Lytton had turned thirty years of age – the age with which he associated the departure of youth in *The Student* – he pondered about aging in the following way:

[...] there is nothing like youth; all we gain in our manhood is dullness itself compared to the zest of novelty, and the worst of it is, the process of acquiring wisdom is but another word for the process of growing old.⁵⁶

⁵³ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 87.

⁵⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Journal*. 1st June 1838. Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 87.

⁵⁵ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 88.

⁵⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Lady Blessington," 31st August 1833, included in R.R. Madden's *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington* (published in London in 1855). Also quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 88.

Bulwer-Lytton thus seemed to follow the prevailing cult of youth associated with dandyism and Romanticism. Nevertheless, the fact of reflecting on old age in his early thirties at the same time he exhibited a great concern about his looks in society also reveals that Bulwer-Lytton's aesthetic theories and dandyism were not gratuitous or superficial but more profound and subversive than they appeared to be at first sight.

Hence, even though Bulwer-Lytton's concern about his looks may have sought to conform to social conventions and acceptance in social circles, the truth is that it often met with a very different response. Despite his gentleman-like appearance, it is a commonly-held belief that Bulwer-Lytton often dressed in a significantly extravagant way that set him apart from the rest. Likewise – as happened to Poe upon returning to America after many years abroad – soon after arriving from Paris, Bulwer-Lytton's looks had a sort of French polish, and his style was often considered too affected not to stand out from the rest of young Englishmen at the time. His golden and abundant hair which he often wore in ringlets and which reached his shoulders inevitably made him different from others, to the extent that some critics often described his appearance as picturesque and ridiculous, and often cursed him for his purported effeminate look. Nevertheless, it is ironic to think that Bulwer-Lytton's concern about dress and appearance at the social gatherings in which he took part ultimately had an impact on the dictates of fashion at the time and he even became an icon of fashion. In this respect, as Sibylla Jane Flower points out, Henry Pelham lent his name to any young man in town wearing a fashionable black coat at evening parties instead of the usual plum-coloured or blue one that had been common up to then.⁵⁷ However, in the meantime, caricatures of Bulwer-Lytton, as a man of fashion, were published in the press of the time, often ridiculing his extravagant attire and affectation.⁵⁸

Sticking to this grandiloquent style from youth to old age, some people believed that Bulwer-Lytton's style was only appropriate for much younger men, and thus blamed him for his apparent inability to look his age. In this sense, it is ironic to think

⁵⁷ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton*. (Aylesbury: Shire, 1973): 13.

⁵⁸ See the cartoon entitled "A Pair," in which Bulwer-Lytton appears together with Charles Dickens, published in 1839. In Leslie Mitchell's *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 133.

that the fashionable dandyism that he adopted in youth in order to be praised and stand out in social circles would later on be turned against him as it was deemed an inappropriate image for someone past his manhood. As a case in point, in his satirical volume *The Book of Snobs*, published in 1848, William Makepeace Thackeray mentioned Bulwer-Lytton in a chapter devoted to literary snobs. Likewise, in an 1870 issue of *Vanity Fair*, Ape published a cartoon of Bulwer-Lytton in old age wearing his famous black coat and the looks that granted him onerous popularity in his youth.⁵⁹ In this sense, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton's use of his attire ultimately had the effect of subverting social conventions and assumed stereotypes of age. Even when, due to illness and overwork, traces of aging began to show in his physique, his extravagant looks and affected style remained very much the same all through his life, dressing in a youthful style despite his old age, as well as exhibiting a younger appearance than was his due in the portraits made of him in later life. In this sense, he seemed to be playing with the traditionally-assumed dictates of aging.

In analogy with Bulwer-Lytton, who was well aware of the artificiality underlying social interaction as well as of the way an individual should present himself in society, the protagonist of his novel *Pelham* also gains gradual insight into the importance attached to first impressions. When Henry Pelham makes his entrance into Parisian society, he states that he intends to set up a character as he feels desirous to be distinguished among the rest. Thus, even if his ambition is to be accepted and praised in society, he also remarks that he wants to stand out, and thus, to rise above the rest, thereby ultimately exposing his own individuality before others. To that effect, he thus ironically unveils the artificial component inherent in constructing the way he presents himself in society:

After various cogitations as to the particular one [character] I should assume, I thought nothing appeared more likely to be obnoxious to men, and therefore pleasing to women, than an egregious coxcomb: accordingly, I arranged myself with singular plainness and simplicity (a low person, by the by, would have done

⁵⁹ This cartoon was published on 29th October 1870, in an issue of *Vanity Fair*, by Carlo Pellegrini (1839-1889), nicknamed Ape (Italian for 'bee'). Pellegrini was an artist who served from 1869 to 1889 as a caricaturist for *Vanity Fair*, one of the leading journals of London society at the time.

just the contrary), and, putting on an air of exceeding languor, made my maiden appearance at Lord Bennington's.⁶⁰

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Henry Pelham makes explicit reference to expressions such as 'assuming a character,' 'arranging oneself,' or 'putting on an air,' which necessarily reveal the constructed quality of the image that the protagonist wishes to project. Hence, this attire could also serve the purpose of wearing a disguise, thus underlining the inevitable constructive and artificial nature characterising social intercourse. In this sense, an exaggerated concern with one's attire lays bare the multiple semantic levels in social interaction, which is particularly evocative of the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin's 'spirit of carnival,' thus assuming that the fact of wearing exaggerated attire can become grotesque and caricaturesque to the extent that, rather than conforming to social etiquette, it may aim at subverting those social ways it apparently seeks to revere.⁶¹ In this sense, according to Bakhtin, the grotesque expresses a reversal of moral and logical expectations, just like carnival implies a change from stability to a path open to constant possibility, ultimately implying that everything is in a state of becoming, from Apollonian order to Dionysian chaos. Hence, metaphorically, attire and clothing play a symbolic role in the construction and deconstruction of identity as well as in the perception of aging.

Similarly, in Poe's tale, Sir Patrick O'Grandison places great importance on appearances, and through his exaggerated acting, he gradually unveils how social identity is constructed. Even though his deep concern about his looks turns him into a vain and conceited character, his obsession with the image he projects also discloses his disquiet and unease as he aspires to become part of the upper social circles. Poe's tale

⁶⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 20. The title of Bulwer-Lytton's novel is remindful of many novels within the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* (German for 'novel of formation') which portrays a coming-of-age story that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. In this context, in her volume *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (1990), Barbara Frey Waxman coined the term *Reifungsroman* (German for 'novel of ripening or maturation') to refer to those narratives that focus on a journey or quest for self-knowledge, particularly from women's perspective.

⁶¹ Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, the concept of 'carnival' is associated with the collectivity inasmuch as those attending this celebration are organized in a way that challenges and subverts social and political organizations. See Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1941).

thus acquires a marked carnivalesque tone, insofar as Sir Patrick draws attention to his clothing and makes use of an affected accent which betrays his true origins, as he describes himself as follows, in a ludicrous way:

Wouldn't it be a blessed thing for your sperrits if ye cud lay your two peepers jist, upon Sir Pathrick O'Grandison, Barrronitt, when he is all riddy dressed for the hopperer, or stipping into the Brisky for the drive into Hyde Park. But it's the iligant big figgur that I ave, for the rason o' which all the ladies fall in love wid me. Isn't it my own swate silf now that'll missure the six fut, and the three inches more nor that, in me stockings, and that am excadingly will proportioned all over to match?⁶²

Likewise, it is of special significance to notice that, at the beginning of Poe's tale, Sir Patrick presents himself to the reader in an indirect way through an accurate description of his visiting card, placing emphasis on his title and his place of residence, which are indicative of his social position. While recounting his courting of Mistress Tracle, Sir Patrick also refers to a series of doings that underline the importance that the action of watching acquires in the tale. In this respect, Sir Patrick narrates how Mistress Tracle looks through the window and observes him through a spy glass, while he takes advantage of the situation and winks at her. The emphasis placed on the act of observing in the tale ultimately underscores the importance attached to appearances and the need to look through them to decode the real intentions of the characters. In this respect, through their social intercourse, Sir Patrick, the Frenchman, and Mistress Tracle join in a sort of masquerade, as if wearing the social mask of the persona they are representing in a play.

Through his tale, Poe underlined the importance given to appearances in society and showed his contempt for the hypocritical quality that he believed characterised the interactions among members belonging to the upper social classes, and yet, he also found himself entangled in this system, inasmuch as he struggled to become part of the same privileged social set for which he also showed a profound disdain. Drawing on biographical accounts, it is possible to identify Poe's concern about social appearances

⁶² Edgar Allan Poe. "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling." (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 464.

in his explicit fondness for having his daguerreotype taken. In particular, most of Poe's surviving daguerreotypes were taken in the last years of his life with the aim to give them to the female socialites he was courting at the time, such as Annie Richmond and Sarah Helen Whitman. Nonetheless, according to biographer Kenneth Silverman, the first portrait ever taken of Poe was left behind in the house where the Allans lived in England,⁶³ which proves that Poe's first pictures were taken already in England in the author's early youth, at the time when Poe began to gain increasing awareness of his social identity. Back in America, it was not until the year 1842 that Poe would have his next portrait taken, known as the 'McKee' daguerreotype,⁶⁴ which bears little resemblance with the later and more popular likenesses of Poe in which he appears with a more tormented look. This particular daguerreotype, which was taken when Poe was in his early thirties, and significantly, only two years after publishing his tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," attains special relevance in reinforcing the author's tenets about social mannerisms and even snobbery as presented in his satirical piece. As Michael Deas claims in his accurate description of the 'McKee' daguerreotype, Poe "holds the pose stiffly, punctiliously [to the extent that] one can clearly sense the ordeal of keeping still for the daguerreotypist's lens."⁶⁵ Hence, Poe's earliest daguerreotype seems to comply with the author's two-fold positioning with regard to society, since, drawing on the metaphor of Poe's projected image in this picture, he appears to conform to the norms, but his pose also connotes a certain abhorrence for them. Accordingly, in Poe's tale, Sir Patrick O'Grandison's immature attitude upon attaching so much importance to social mannerisms also comes hand-in-hand with the author's condemnation of them.

⁶³ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 22.

⁶⁴ According to Michael Deas, the 'McKee' daguerreotype is the earliest and least familiar of Poe's images, and it is named after its last identified owner, Thomas J. McKee. See Michael Deas' *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 12-15.

⁶⁵ Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 12.



Figure 3 - Poe in the 'McKee' daguerreotype, c.1842.

Taken from: Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*.

(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 13.

If in Poe's tale, Sir Patrick O'Grandison conceals his actual intention to rise in society through overstated mannerisms, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Henry Pelham* also hides his actual personality through his disguise as a socialite. Despite being considered a major character within the silver-fork genre, representative of good manners and social praise, Henry Pelham also conceals more profound interests that endow him with a more intricate and even dual nature. He is considered a dandy and a man of fashion, but also a rebel as well as a philosopher and a moralist, especially through the change he subsequently undergoes once he has acquired admiration and social acclaim. As a character, Henry Pelham exemplifies the way aesthetics can ultimately turn into ethics, as he leaves aside his fondness for socialising when, through his uncle's advice, he exchanges, even if momentarily, social intercourse for the pursuit of knowledge. It is at

this stage that Henry Pelham gradually gains insight into a transitional period in his life which will ultimately lead him to maturation. For some time, he grows more reflective and introspective, detached from society and devoted to the perusal of books. Up to then, he admits he “had no guide but passion; no rule but the impulse of the moment,”⁶⁶ but from then onwards, as a result of his studies and the teachings of his instructor, he obtains “a clear knowledge of moral principle,”⁶⁷ thus ultimately joining aesthetics and passion with ethics and morality.

As happens to Henry Pelham in the novel, in his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton also referred to some periods of dejection and isolation that he experienced during his stay in Paris. His frequent engagement in social gatherings and indulgence in excitement and dissipation subsequently gave way to periods of retirement and reflection. Despite his intense habit of socialising, Bulwer-Lytton also sought retirement in Versailles, where he could read and write, away from the crowd. His friend, Mrs Cunningham, became well aware of that, often addressing Bulwer-Lytton as her ‘dear Childe Harold,’⁶⁸ precisely due to his frequent fits of dejection, which also seemed to disclose an apparently paradoxical aversion towards society. Henry Pelham’s dual nature thus reflects Bulwer-Lytton’s ambivalent ways at the time, dividing his attention between his public persona and his fondness for privacy and isolation. Accordingly, it is significant to notice that, during one of his sojourns at Versailles, Bulwer-Lytton wrote and completed his novel *Pelham*, portraying a hero that excels in socialising and attracting public admiration, but who also gradually gains insight into the artificial and even theatrical component often inherent in social interaction.

As a turning-point, in Bulwer-Lytton’s biography, Robert Lytton refers to a period in his father’s life that clearly brings to mind some scenes depicting Henry

⁶⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 99.

⁶⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 98.

⁶⁸ Lord Byron’s lengthy poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* was published between 1812 and 1818, and portrays the adventures and reflections of a young man, who, dissatisfied with a life of pleasure and revelry, decides to look for distraction in foreign lands. Taking into consideration that the title of Byron’s poem derives from the term ‘childe,’ which is a medieval title for a young man who was candidate for knighthood, it seems an appropriate term with which to refer to Bulwer-Lytton at his coming-of-age.

Pelham's indulgence in misbehaviour. In the course of his stay in Paris, Bulwer-Lytton sometimes frequented gambling-houses at night, and won significant sums of money due to his dexterity at the game. Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton never felt proud of his dissolute habits and his overindulgence made him aware of a dual nature in him that he particularly deplored. This duality became particularly noticeable in a biographical episode which took place after spending one night gambling in Paris and winning a considerable sum of money as a result. His son Robert Lytton described this passage in his father's biography in the following way:

The day was dawning when he reached his own rooms. His writing-desk stood upon a *console* in front of a mirror; and, pausing over it to lock up his winnings, he was startled and shocked by the reflection of his face in the glass behind it. The expression of the countenance was not only haggard, it was sinister. He had risked far more than he could afford to lose; his luck had been extraordinary, and his gains were great. But the ignoble emotions of the night had left their lingering traces in his face; and, as he caught sight of his own features still working and gleaming with the fever of a vicious excitement, he, for the first time, despised himself.⁶⁹

This epiphanic moment in Bulwer-Lytton's youth underlines his realisation of the duality inherent in the individual. His reflection in the mirror – indicative of the figure of 'the *doppelgänger*' – reveals his dual ways as well as the transition he was to undergo after this event. Aware of the physical traces that his dissipation had left on his persona, he resolved not to gamble anymore, well aware of the negative influence his continuous outgoings were beginning to exert on him. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton precisely decided to disclose this event when his son Robert was still very young, with the aim to warn him about the dangers derived from gambling.

In the scene described, Bulwer-Lytton also gained insight into the first symptoms of aging that could be traced in his reflection in the mirror, which he definitely assumed to be the result of his dissolute habits at night. Inevitably, this biographical episode in Bulwer-Lytton's life brings to mind Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), inasmuch as Dorian Gray's gradual transformation and abrupt

⁶⁹ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 24.

process of aging in Basil Hallward's picture of him reflects the young man's ultimate fall into dissipation and sin. In this respect, the traces of aging are perceived, then, as a result of succumbing to temptation, thereby ultimately acquiring undesirable connotations, as is also the case in Oscar Wilde's seminal novel. However, these traces are also the result of his socialising habits, that is, of his learning the social ways that would ultimately lead him to acceptance in determinate social circles. Hence, there is a dual perception of society as well as of aging, as debasing and edifying, as an embodiment of both corruption and redemption since, in Bulwer-Lytton's biographical episode, the social outgoings that leave an imprint on his traits ultimately open the path for reforming his character as well as for accepting his responsibilities as a young man coming of age.

This biographical event in which Bulwer-Lytton contemplates his image in the mirror, noticing the first traces of aging and seemingly considering them the result of his dissolute life, also bears an important resemblance with a significant scene in his novel *Pelham*. In an attempt to exonerate his friend and nemesis Reginald Glanville, who is wrongly accused of murdering Sir John Tyrrell, Henry Pelham is required to pretend at being a monk in order to approach the real murderer, Dawson, and thus, listen to the confession of his crime. In order to play his part, Henry Pelham puts on some make-up and cuts his hair short, and he also wears some filthy clothes, adjusting both his looks and behaviour to his being mistaken for the monk who will accompany Dawson in his last hours. In his disguise, Pelham looks ostensibly older than he actually is, and it could be argued that he is literally wearing a 'mask of age.' Being accustomed to playing his part in the circle of the privileged social classes, where he was equally praised for his youth and extravagant attire, Pelham is then required to play out an entirely different role in order to be accepted at the opposite end of the social spectrum, looking older and of a definitely humbler condition. Nonetheless, Pelham's performance is so convincing and he gets so much into his part that, not only is he able to overhear Dawson's confession as he intended, but once his performance comes to an end, Pelham even finds it difficult to remove his 'mask of age,' claiming: "am I, before I have reached my twenty-third year, to look like a Methodist parson on the wrong side of

forty?”⁷⁰ Pelham’s transformation into an older man ultimately serves the purpose of acquitting Reginald Glanville, but it also confirms Pelham’s own metaphorical rite of passage in his process of coming of age. Likewise, the fact that Pelham puts on some make-up and disguises as an old man also evokes the constructive quality of aging that is revealed in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, which comes hand-in-hand with the carnivalesque condition that often prevails in the interaction of characters in society, as is shown in the novel.

Hence, having gained insight into his overstated commitment to social life up to then, a change in Pelham’s life is finally effected, thus growing more detached and taciturn, having learned about the performative and forged nature characterising social interaction. Contemplating his image as an older man, while wearing his disguise as a monk, Pelham seems to emulate the change Bulwer-Lytton also experienced in his personal life in the scene described above, when he looked at himself in the mirror. In this respect, in her work about specular moments, Kay Heath claims that, in Victorian novels, men and women peer into mirrors to calculate the effect of age on their bodies, and hence plan their life accordingly. In this respect, to use Kay Heath’s words,

[...] mirror scenes, functioning as fictive records of moments in this life-long dialogue, reveal age anxiety at its height. As characters in Victorian novels regard their mirrored faces, they decide whether to associate with or dissociate from age in a conversation with self that becomes highly relevant to the outcome of their plot. This interplay between the mirrored image and the characters’ words is an uneasy negotiation, a tension never fully resolved, comprised of conscious intentions and unconscious, culturally inscribed age scripts.⁷¹

In both cases, it can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton, together with his literary character, Henry Pelham, suffer a rite of passage on peering into their older selves, while displaying, from then onwards, a more conscientious approach to life as a result of this experience.

⁷⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 296.

⁷¹ Kay Heath. *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009): 148.

Likewise, in the context of cultural gerontology, Kathleen Woodward claims that the image of the mirror pervades literary representations of the aged body.⁷² As happens with Pelham in this passage of Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the scene of contemplating one's aged body through 'the shock of recognition,'⁷³ to use Woodward's words, involves experiencing 'the uncanny,' which Freud considered as something familiar that has been repressed, insofar as the mirror-image of an aged person becomes the materialisation of 'the unconscious' and the representation of its future absence.⁷⁴ Similarly, in her seminal volume *The Coming of Age* (1970), Simone de Beauvoir argues that the recognition of old age comes from the figure of 'the other,' thus stating that "within me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider – who is old: and that Other is myself."⁷⁵ For de Beauvoir, an individual's old age is conditioned by social context, and the way we respond to our mirror-image is in accordance with whether our attitude toward old age is positive or negative, which is determined, in turn, by those values held by a society, given that old age is a social, cultural, and to a certain extent, an ethical construct. In Bulwer-Lytton's silver-fork novel *Pelham*, in the context of the cult of dandyism, the scene in which Pelham, as representative of the figure of the dandy, looks at his aged 'double' in the mirror turns into the reverse of the classical myth of Narcissus, insofar as he suffers an aggressive 'shock of recognition' of his aged mirror-image, since as Christopher Lasch argues in his important study *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), dread of old age is not rooted in a cult of youth, but, rather, in a cult of 'the self.'⁷⁶ To use Woodward's words, "as we age we increasingly separate what we

⁷² Kathleen Woodward. "The Mirror Stage of Old Age." (Kathleen Woodward, and Murray M. Schwartz. Eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging, Literature, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 104.

⁷³ Kathleen Woodward. "The Mirror Stage of Old Age." (Kathleen Woodward, and Murray M. Schwartz. Eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging, Literature, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 105.

⁷⁴ Kathleen Woodward. "The Mirror Stage of Old Age." (Kathleen Woodward, and Murray M. Schwartz. Eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging, Literature, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 106.

⁷⁵ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Coming of Age*. [Trans. Patrick O'Brian] (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1973): 420.

⁷⁶ Christopher Lasch. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

take to be our real selves from our bodies,”⁷⁷ and in short, it is argued that what we consider to be our real, youthful ‘selves’ are hidden inside our aged bodies, to the extent that “old age is a state in which the body is in opposition to the self;”⁷⁸ a paradoxical condition whereby, while we feel young, others perceive and consider us old.

Drawing on psychoanalytical precepts that warn about the alienating effects of identifying with an image, Woodward refers to ‘the mirror-stage of old age’ as the reverse counterpart to the infant’s ‘mirror-stage’ that Jacques Lacan proposed. Lacan’s infant’s ‘mirror-stage’ involves the infant perceiving the image of the body as an ideal unity, while experiencing its lack of coordination. This implies that it is the difference between the visual image of unity and the experience of fragmentation that brings ‘the ego’ into existence and leads the infant into the realm of the imaginary. Conversely, according to Woodward, in ‘the mirror-stage of old age,’ the subject feels that ‘the whole self’ resides within, whereas ‘the image-in-the-mirror’ is interpreted as anticipating inevitable, future disintegration, to the extent that, in contrast with the mirror-stage of infancy, the ‘mirror-stage of old age’ may imply the loss of the imaginary.⁷⁹ The scene in which Henry Pelham contemplates his image in the mirror while disguised as an old man acquires significance as an example of ‘the mirror-stage of old age,’ especially insofar as Pelham identifies with his image as a dandy – in perpetual association with youth – while he suffers ‘the shock of recognition,’ rejecting his mirror-image as anticipating evidence of his disintegration, since it stands in complete contrast with the idealised image with which he associates himself as a dandy. Symbolically, in the course of this scene, Pelham feels trapped between two images of himself, which seem superimposed the one on top of the other. On looking into the mirror in the company of one of his young friends, and thereby, significantly, while

⁷⁷ Kathleen Woodward. “The Mirror Stage of Old Age.” (Kathleen Woodward, and Murray M. Schwartz. Eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging, Literature, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 104.

⁷⁸ Kathleen Woodward. “The Mirror Stage of Old Age.” (Kathleen Woodward, and Murray M. Schwartz. Eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging, Literature, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 104.

⁷⁹ Kathleen Woodward. “The Mirror Stage of Old Age.” (Kathleen Woodward, and Murray M. Schwartz. Eds. *Memory and Desire: Aging, Literature, Psychoanalysis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 110.

under the gaze of 'the other,' Pelham protests at his friend's eagerness for him to remove his make-up as an old man. This mirror-scene in Bulwer-Lytton's novel exemplifies Woodward's premise that 'the mirror-stage of old age' is eminently triangular, involving two images of oneself – a younger one and an older one – in addition to the gaze of 'the other.' This reinforces the contention that so-called 'old-age' is constructed as a social category, and thus, it is noteworthy that Pelham gains insight into his process of aging through the gaze of 'the other,' that is to say, through society.

As will be shown in the next section of this chapter, in Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," there is a moment in which Sir Patrick and his antagonist, the Frenchman, appear to emulate each other's moves, thus creating a sort of mirror effect in which they look at one another as if they were doubles. Scarcely one year prior to the publication of this satirical piece, Poe published his tale "William Wilson," which has often been interpreted as paradigmatic of the figure of the double. As is well-known, at the ending of this tale, there is a scene in which the protagonist beholds his distorted features in a sort of metaphorical mirror as he stares at his antagonist:

A large mirror, – so at first seemed to me in my confusion – now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait.⁸⁰

This fictional scene in Poe's tale "William Wilson" bears a close resemblance with Bulwer-Lytton's episode as recounted in his autobiography, as he feels shocked upon beholding his unrecognisable features in the mirror after a night of gambling. Likewise, this sort of metaphorical mask, which covered Bulwer-Lytton's features and was ultimately transposed in his novel *Pelham* as the protagonist disguises himself, also brings to mind Poe's own symbolic mask. As Dawn Sova claims, the dissolute habits that ruin William Wilson's life in Poe's tale have often been associated with the

⁸⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. "William Wilson." (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 448.

author's own dissipated conduct during his stay at the University of Virginia.⁸¹ As biographer Kenneth Silverman discloses, it was customary that students participated in riots at the university and joined in reprobate behaviour while being masked.⁸² Accordingly, upon socialising and gambling, Poe felt metaphorically faced by his wicked double – his masked self – as also happens to Sir Patrick O'Grandison in Poe's sardonic tale, who, upon socialising with the Frenchman and competing against him for the love of Mistress Tracle, also shows his mischievous side, and even if momentarily, forgets his manners and ironically dismisses his rival, swearing "bad luck to him,"⁸³ as evidence of the scorn Sir Patrick feels towards the Frenchman.

Antagonists at the social gathering: Reginald Glanville, Frederick Villiers, the Frenchman, and Neilson Poe

In the course of their coming-out in society, both Sir Patrick O'Grandison and Henry Pelham get acquainted with different individuals, and in particular, with a male friend that gradually transforms into their antagonist. The meeting of this male individual exerts an important influence on the protagonist, especially as their relationship transforms from friendship into hatred. In both cases, the characters of the Frenchman in Poe's tale and of Reginald Glanville in Bulwer-Lytton's novel were also grounded in actual figures that the authors respectively met in their lives. In this sense, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Henry Pelham becomes very close to his friend Reginald Glanville, but gradually, they lose touch with each other, and through social prejudices and the concern about appearances, they actually turn into doubles of one another. As will be shown, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to portray the character of Reginald Glanville in the light of one of his personal acquaintances.

⁸¹ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 256.

⁸² Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 31.

⁸³ Edgar Allan Poe. "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling." (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 466.

According to Leslie Mitchell, Bulwer-Lytton had few close friends in England and – with the exception of John Forster, Charles Dickens, and Benjamin Disraeli – he seemed to prefer the company of foreigners or Cambridge friends that used to live abroad for months.⁸⁴ A case in point was Frederick Villiers, with whom Bulwer-Lytton had become closely acquainted at Cambridge and whom he was to meet again in Brighton, where Bulwer-Lytton had decided to spend some time after putting an end to his affair with Caroline Lamb. Bulwer-Lytton's college friend, Frederick Villiers, was a man full of light and shadows, of high rank but of dubious origins, and of blatant talent but with an uncertain future. He was the son of a gentleman of ancient birth and of a young lady of rank, whom he had seduced by promising to marry her, and after finishing his education at Eton, Frederick Villiers was sent abroad to learn foreign languages with a view to beginning a diplomatic career. Bulwer-Lytton first met him at Trinity College in Cambridge when Villiers considered pursuing a career in politics.

Together with the letters that Frederick Villiers addressed to Bulwer-Lytton, there was a memorandum dated 1869 in which Robert Lytton found his father to have produced a sketch of his close friend in youth. The fact that, in his old age, Bulwer-Lytton still pondered about recollections of his friend underlines the important effect that Villiers had exerted on him, to the extent of arising as a sort of *alter ego* of the man he himself could have been. In depicting Frederick Villiers, Bulwer-Lytton for the most part unveiled an outstanding ambivalent character. Having already spent some time abroad when he met Bulwer-Lytton, Villiers always appeared older than his fellows due to the premature experience of life that he had acquired in foreign cities. Bulwer-Lytton remembered how Frederick Villiers had struck his fellows in Cambridge as being particularly witty and amusing, and how his promising career ultimately led him to Parliament. Nonetheless, despite his alluring disposition, in his sketch, Bulwer-Lytton also highlighted his friend's notorious lack of motive power, stating that Villiers was the least ambitious man of talent he had ever met. Despite being extraordinary and fearless in youth, as Bulwer-Lytton admitted having been his friend's second in two

⁸⁴ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 89.

duels, through time Villiers apparently grew cynical and detached, rejecting new ideas for the sake of old ones, to the extent that, in his old age, Bulwer-Lytton literally described him stating that “he is now becoming rather a bore.”⁸⁵

In spite of Bulwer-Lytton’s changing opinion about the friend of his youth, it seems a fact that Frederick Villiers exerted a profound effect on him and, as a matter of fact, in his memorandum, Bulwer-Lytton openly admitted that Frederick Villiers had been a clear influence when writing his novel *Pelham*.⁸⁶ In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton seemed to have devised his fictional character Reginald Glanville mirroring the image of his actual friend Frederick Villiers, since, in the novel, Glanville, like Villiers, is mostly characterised as apparently mirthful in his social intercourse, but nevertheless, haunted by some inexplicable gloom that seems to detach him from others. In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Reginald Glanville is also Henry Pelham’s close friend in youth, even though Pelham’s estimation of him gradually changes, even turning into his nemesis, insofar as Glanville appears to become involved in unlawful matters. Like Frederick Villiers, Reginald Glanville belongs to an illustrious lineage, his father being a baronet and his mother being a woman with talent and ambition, and as also was the case with Bulwer-Lytton’s close friend in youth, Glanville is educated at Eton, where he becomes acquainted with Pelham in the novel. Even though Pelham and Glanville remain close friends, both their character and behaviour gradually seem to differ quite ostensibly from each other, since, if Pelham is fond of socialising and even gambling, Glanville often behaves like a recluse due to a persistent melancholia that sets him apart from the rest of the students. After leaving Eton, both friends separate, not to meet each other for years, but it is after finishing his studies at Cambridge, as Bulwer-Lytton did himself, that Pelham meets Glanville again, even if in remarkably strange circumstances.

In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, invited to enjoy the shooting season with Sir Lionel Garrett, Pelham spends some time at Garrett Park, and it is there that, behind the filthy and scruffy appearance of what appears to be a vagrant, Pelham recognises the dear

⁸⁵ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 332.

⁸⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 332.

friend of his youth, Reginald Glanville. Even though, at first sight, Glanville seems to be utterly trapped in poverty and misery, his words, upon meeting his friend, disclose that he is actually engaging in a folly, thus revealing that he is ultimately pretending to be what he is truly not. Subsequently, while socialising in Paris, Pelham meets his old friend again, although Glanville seems to have undergone an important change, not only in appearance but also in as far as his own personality is concerned, since his former lonely and melancholic mood has given way to a sociable and extrovert public figure that seems to bear no resemblance with Pelham's memories of his friend in youth. At this stage, Pelham believes that he is witnessing the moral and social debacle of Glanville, as he is often seen gambling and frequenting places of dubious reputation. Pelham's prejudices against his former friend even lead him to suspect Glanville to be guilty of the murder of Sir John Tyrrell – a baronet of low reputation who is found dead in the forest – as, next to his corpse, Pelham finds undeniable evidence incriminating Glanville.

In order to have his suspicions against Glanville confirmed, Pelham ultimately discards having any sort of social intercourse with his former friend, and instead, he observes him at a distance with the aim of identifying any evidence in his behaviour that might betray his guilt. Their former friendship gradually turns into enmity which reaches its climax at a ball at Lady Roseville's, where Pelham refuses to shake hands with Reginald, thus declining a sign of cordiality, and ultimately, acknowledging his hostility towards his former friend publicly. This scene is described as follows in the novel:

Glanville seemed paler than usual, and perhaps even sadder; but he was less *distract* and abstracted; no sooner did he see, than he approached me, and extended his hand with great cordiality. *His hand!* Thought I, and I could not bring myself to accept it; I merely addressed him in the common-place salutation. He looked hard and inquisitively at me, and then turned abruptly away.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 204.

Pelham's refusal to shake hands with Glanville can be interpreted as a direct affront, since Pelham's action takes place publicly and, bearing in mind that Pelham is a reputed member of the upper-social classes, his behaviour acquires greater transcendence as it is through Pelham's act that Reginald is formally proclaimed a social outcast.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham*, all acts performed in society become particularly symbolic, as through his development, Pelham learns about the conventions regulating social intercourse, and how behaving appropriately and establishing suitable connections in society may grant oneself important benefits. In this sense, Pelham often gives an accurate account of his attire, the topics of conversations he engages in, as well as the way he behaves at a ball or a dinner, even ultimately producing a compilation of maxims aimed at instructing individuals to interact in society successfully. Conversely, even if wealthy and procuring himself a successful career as a politician and Member of Parliament – as Bulwer-Lytton's friend, Frederick Villiers, himself did – Glanville is apparently enmeshed in criminal deeds and interacts with gamblers of dubious reputation, thus subverting social conventions and subtly detaching himself from what is termed 'normative' in society. Nonetheless, despite this apparently conflicting behaviour, both Pelham and Glanville share a common concern about the image they wish to project so as to cause a particular effect in the course of their social interactions, and thus, they both take on an active role by which to determine the way they are perceived in the social order. In this respect, in their social intercourse, they become actors playing the part they wish to play in society, as well as projecting an image of themselves that they consciously aim to show.

According to Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, the Victorians showed a remarkable fascination with the notion of 'the Self.'⁸⁸ Drawing on Ervin Goffman's work on the presentation of 'the Self' in society, it is argued that, "when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey."⁸⁹ In this

⁸⁸ Robert Douglas-Fairhurst. *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸⁹ Ervin Goffman. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972): 15-16.

respect, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Pelham's conduct is often socially-sanctioned, granting him a well-established position within the circle of the privileged classes, but having been raised to excel socially, his social success has been the result of the image he has been so careful to project before others, taking advantage of social intercourse to ultimately reap the profit derived from his social performance. Conversely, Glanville's association with criminal spheres inevitably renders him a social outcast, but, as is ultimately revealed in the novel, the fact of forging this less alluring status also responds to a carefully-devised plan to take revenge for the death of his beloved, Gertrude Douglas, thus intending to associate with rascals of dubious reputation to get closer to her murderer and punish him for his deed. Hence, even if apparently occupying different positions within the social spectrum, both Pelham and Glanville are aware of the importance attached to the presentation of 'the Self' in society, and consequently, they respectively make use of it to achieve their respective purposes.

Having gained insight into the ways of society, Pelham is well aware of the effects that his interaction with Glanville may have, and thus rejects to openly shake hands with his friend in youth, as he predicts that his association with Glanville may have a negative effect on his public persona. In this way, Pelham's reaction conforms to Ervin Goffman's later precept that one's behaviour is modulated according to how others conduct themselves in their social intercourse.⁹⁰ Hence, the behaviour of one individual responds to that of another in interaction, given the fact that each individual aims to control the image they project as well as predict the reaction they will get from others in response. In this respect, having read the signs wrongly, Pelham gets the impression that Glanville is involved in criminal endeavours, and consequently, he is influenced to behave in such a way as to reject any association with his former friend, believing that, should Glanville be finally prosecuted, others would then take it for granted that he approves of Reginald's behaviour, and would consequently deny him entrance into the privileged circles of society. In return, Pelham's discourteous reaction leads Glanville to modulate his conduct with regard to his former friend, ultimately planning to unveil his intended plans of revenge so as to try to regain Pelham's favour.

⁹⁰ Ervin Goffman. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

It is in this sense that Ervin Goffman defines interaction as “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions in one another’s immediate physical presence.”⁹¹ Accordingly, each character behaves in response to the behaviour of others, while he also tries to predict the effect that his respective actions will have on the reactions that he will get from others.

Nevertheless, as Bulwer-Lytton shows in his novel *Pelham*, impressions are often given too much credit, as the way characters modulate their behaviour may also respond to impressions that are ultimately found to be groundless. As a case in point, even if Pelham may give the impression of being a socialite, while Glanville’s gambling habits apparently turn him into a despicable character, the two men have more in common than expected, hence calling into question the impressions gained from others that eventually condition the individuals’ actions. The public image that both friends exhibit stands in sharp contrast with their respective private selves, as they prove to be more thoughtful and introvert than they appear to be at first sight. In this respect, Pelham is actually closer to Glanville than he suspects, since, as if trapped in a sort of mirror-image effect and by means of careful observation, Pelham subtly emulates Glanville, and *vice versa*, that is, Glanville also imitates Pelham’s movements, thereby ultimately turning into a *doppelgänger* of each other.

In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Pelham is obviously caught in a moral conflict when he has to decide whether to stand by the old friend of his youth or detach himself from Glanville so as not to threaten his privileged position in the social spectrum. As critic John Herdman contends, the double motif considered in the work of nineteenth-century novelists is predominantly associated with “moral conflict, with conflict in the human will, with the dialectic of spiritual pride, and especially with the problem of evil and the issue of free will.”⁹² In fact, Pelham necessarily recognises himself in Glanville, as, despite being a socialite and a dandy, Pelham also grows aware of the superficialities lying inherent in society, thus also enjoying solitude and reflection in his private life. Likewise, Pelham also realises that not all members of the privileged classes are

⁹¹ Ervin Goffman. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972): 26.

⁹² John Herdman. *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. (London: Macmillan, 1990): 3-4.

necessarily decent and moral, contending that being up or down the social ladder seems ultimately to be determined merely by fate.

Hence, Pelham and Glanville personify the figure of the double of one another. Even if Glanville is found to live like a vagrant, he is necessarily in disguise, as Pelham soon finds him socialising in his own privileged circles and being praised and admired as he himself has been. Nonetheless, despite this social façade, Glanville still prefers the seclusion of his private life, which also used to characterise his youth, especially after the painful death of his beloved. Similarly, even if Pelham excels in social interaction, he is also critical of social life and gradually grows more thoughtful and taciturn, particularly when he suspects that the old friend of his youth may be guilty of murder. Once Glanville ultimately confesses that his erratic behaviour responds to the purpose of avenging the death of Gertrude Douglas, Pelham helps him gather evidence to charge Sir John Tyrrell with the murder, and meaningfully, it is then that, like Glanville, Pelham finds himself frequenting the same dubious places and associating with the same gang of gamblers. Both friends thus present remarkable similarities, insofar as they both excel in socialising, but become critical of social life, while, as they age, they also grow more reflective, gaining insight into the pretence that often lies beneath social intercourse, and becoming aware that socialising is not entirely different from performing on stage. Hence, as they come of age, Pelham and Glanville gradually transform from being friends into becoming adversaries, as well as from being opponents into becoming double figures of each other.

The shift from comradeship to rivalry and *vice versa* exemplified by Pelham and Glanville in Bulwer-Lytton's novel is also ironically addressed in Poe's social satire "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," as the narrator, Patrick O'Grandison, and his opponent, the Frenchman, compete for the love of Miss Tracle. In the tale, Sir Patrick soon gives notable signs of displeasure towards his French contender, describing him as "the little ould furrener Frinchman,"⁹³ and thus, dismissing him, through social prejudice, as an old man of foreign origins. Nonetheless, in his aim

⁹³ Edgar Allan Poe. "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 466.

to court Miss Tracle, Sir Patrick's nemesis ultimately turns into the Irish baronet's own reflection, since it is on the Frenchman that he seems to project all those qualities – as an old foreigner – that he actually fails to recognise in his own persona. From Sir Patrick's perspective, in clear resemblance with himself, the Frenchman places a great importance on the way he presents himself in society; he cannot properly be considered part of the London upper social classes due to his condition as a foreigner, and moreover, he also appears to be in love with the same woman. Accordingly, the Irish baronet despises the same qualities that he praises in himself when he finds them in his adversary, and hence, even if inadvertently, his description of the Frenchman responds to a reflection of his own 'Self,' thus alternatively shifting from apparent rivals to actual double figures.

In particular, this parallelism comes to the fore when both characters in Poe's tale find one another seated on both sides of Miss Tracle, trying to defeat each other in their aim to court the pretty widow. In their contest, while imitating the moves and advances of one another, they ultimately find out that they have both failed in their purposes, given that, instead of holding the hand of Miss Tracle behind her back, as they had initially believed, both men realise they have merely been shaking each other's hands, as the following humorous excerpt asserts:

But off she [Miss Tracle] wint down the stairs like a shot, and then I turned round to the little Frinch furrenner. Och bon! If it wasn't his spalpeeney little paw that I had hould of in my own [...] And maybe it wasn't mesilf that jist died then outight wid the laffin, to behold the little chap when he found that it wasn't the widdy at all at all that he had hould of all the time but only Sir Pathrick O'Grandison.⁹⁴

This scene in Poe's tale in which Sir Patrick and the Frenchman find themselves holding hands unwillingly can be interpreted as a reversal of the scene in Bulwer-Lytton's novel in which Pelham refuses to shake hands with Glanville. Both scenes, though, underscore that both Sir Patrick and Pelham present a defective perception and reveal that first

⁹⁴ Edgar Allan Poe. "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 470.

impressions can be deceitful. In this respect, Poe's tale unfolds as a continuous series of mistaken perceptions which are initially hinted at by ironic instances of visual impairment. As a case in point, Miss Tracle takes a closer look at Sir Patrick through her window by the paradoxical and unexpected use of a spyglass. Likewise, when the Frenchman hands out his visiting card to the Irish baronet, the latter cannot possibly read his long name on account of being inscribed with copper-plate printing. Drawing attention to these apparent visual impairments anticipates the characters' blatant mistaken perceptions, which ultimately lead Sir Patrick to take for granted he is holding hands with Mistress Tracle when, ironically, he is actually shaking hands with his rival. To take revenge for what Sir Patrick perceives to be the perpetration of an affront, he ultimately squeezes the Frenchman's hand he was holding, thus revealing the reason why the Frenchman actually wears his hand in a sling.

In Poe's tale, the eventual, even if reluctant, act of shaking hands between rivals underscores the fact that they may actually have more in common than meets the eye. It is in this sense that Miss Tracle, mediating between both pretenders, acts as a kind of mirror in which both rivals observe their image reflected, as they imitate each other's moves to accomplish their common aim of conquering the pretty widow just to subsequently acknowledge their mutual failure. In this sense, even if necessarily more sardonic in this case, this moment of realisation, followed by Sir Patrick's ultimate vindictive action at the end of the tale, brings to mind – as previously noticed – the more dramatic resolution of Poe's best-known tale about the figure of the *doppelgänger* "William Wilson." In fact, at the end of Poe's tale, William Wilson plunges a sword into his rival, who responds to his very same name, only to find out that, in slaying his rival, he also slays himself, as they are both found to share the same identity. Likewise, in Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," upon holding and ultimately squeezing the Frenchman's hand, Sir Patrick may also be revealing much about himself and, by extension, about the author of the tale as well.

Given its title, Poe's social satire "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" seeks to give an ironic account of why Sir Patrick's nemesis has adopted an idiosyncratic gesture, which, given his French nationality, necessarily evokes the figure

of the historical French statesman Napoleon Bonaparte. Significantly, Poe would also allude to this same historical character in another comic grotesque, “The Spectacles” (1844), published four years later. In this tale, its narrator and protagonist is significantly called Napoleon Bonaparte Simpson, and he also becomes object of scorn for his short-sightedness and his reluctance to wear glasses despite his acute myopia, thus mistaking an elderly lady for a girl in the prime of her youth, and ultimately, marrying her as a result of his defective perception. Nevertheless, evocations as well as explicit references to Napoleon Bonaparte in some of Poe’s tales – as is the case with “The Spectacles” and “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling” – also seem to transcend the domain of fiction and materialise in Poe’s real life, thus also contributing to blurring differences between double figures and rivals in a number of biographical events, as will be shown below.

As happens in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, in which the character of Reginald Glanville bears much resemblance with the author’s acquaintance Frederick Villiers, in Poe’s tale, given the fact that Sir Patrick O’Grandison is somehow sarcastically reminiscent of Poe himself, it can be argued that the Frenchman of the tale is also based on Poe’s own antagonists. In the course of his life, Poe met several opponents who would qualify as personal nemeses coming from both the literary world as well as from his private sphere. As a case in point, Poe and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow remained at the centre of a renowned literary battle when, despite admiring his poetic qualities, Poe accused the latter of plagiarism; and yet, Poe himself also had to bear being accused of the same offence, occasionally not without justification according to biographer Kenneth Silverman.⁹⁵ In this respect, Poe’s tale “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling,” in which Sir Patrick O’Grandison and the Frenchman copy the movements of one another, appears to be a veiled reference to Poe’s accusation of plagiarism. Likewise, Poe and Rufus Wilmot Griswold also became literary and personal contenders, as Poe attacked Griswold’s work, while the latter began to exact revenge as soon as Poe passed away through an injurious obituary, which would

⁹⁵ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 70-71.

subsequently determine Poe's dubious reputation from then on.⁹⁶ Hence, Poe seemed to have both admired and detested Longfellow and Griswold, and equally, he also met with the same ambivalent feelings on behalf of his two literary nemeses.

Family was, as well, a source of characters in whom Poe would mirror himself, and for whom, at times, he would also show his utmost contempt. As a case in point, even though Poe's foster father, John Allan, reared him to become heir to his fortune, when Poe entered adolescence, his relationship with his foster father began to deteriorate, and formally came to an end when John Allan eventually omitted mentioning Poe in his will. For the most part, Poe had grown up mirroring himself in his foster father's image, and naturally expected to become legally adopted, and hence, formally accepted as his legitimate son. However, his formal rejection, along with his father's reluctance to help him in economic constraints, gradually turn Poe's envisioned father figure into his personal nemesis, and it was for all his life that Poe would nourish these ambivalent feelings of awe and hatred towards John Allan. And yet, in even closer resemblance with the romantic contest between pretenders in his tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," in his own family context, Poe appeared to discover his real double as well as his personal nemesis in his second cousin, Neilson Poe.

As a true double-figure, having been born in the same year as Poe and sharing the same family name, Neilson Poe also had literary expectations, and became a journalist and editor for different newspapers, even though he later abandoned any hopes of a literary vocation for a career in law. Despite being family, Poe never seemed to be on good terms with his cousin, mostly because, according to biographer John Carl Miller, Poe believed Neilson never provided the kind of assistance expected from a close family relative.⁹⁷ Neilson Poe was not only Poe's second cousin, but he was also married to Josephine Emily Clemm, who was Virginia Clemm's half-sister, thus, even though they were relatives in origin, they also strengthened their familial ties through

⁹⁶ Rufus Wilmot Griswold. "Death of Edgar A. Poe." *New York Daily Tribune*. (October 9, 1849): 2, col. 3-4.

⁹⁷ John Carl Miller. *Building Poe Biography*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1977): 52.

their respective marriages. However, their attachment turned from respect to jealousy, and *vice versa*, blurring any definite differences between rivals and doubles. As a case in point, in a letter addressed to Neilson Poe, dated 8th August 1845, despite using a fond and respectful tone throughout, Poe finished his letter giving some signs of jealousy, stating: “I rejoice to learn that you prosper at all points. I hear of you often. ‘The B. Journal’ flourishes – but in January I shall establish a Magazine.”⁹⁸ Judging from his words, despite acknowledging Neilson’s prosperity and fame, Poe could not help drawing attention to his own success, even posing a sort of challenge at the end, taking for granted that the establishment of the magazine he had coveted all his life was finally turning into a feasible project.

Nonetheless, there might have been more personal reasons that account for this evident mutual dislike. Poe’s contempt for Neilson was explicitly revealed when the latter refused to publish a flattering account of Poe’s literary achievements in his journal. In a letter to his physician Joseph Evans Snodgrass, dated 7th October 1839, Poe thus confessed to him the way he felt about his cousin:

I felt that N. Poe, would not insert the article editorially. In your private ear, I believe him to be the bitterest enemy I have in the world. He is the more despicable in this, since he makes loud professions of friendship. [...] I cannot account for his hostility except in being vain enough to imagine him jealous of the little reputation I have, of late years, obtained. But enough of the little dog. [...] I sincerely thank you for the interest you have taken in my well-doing. The friendship of a man of talent, who is at the same time a man of honourable feeling, is especially valuable in these days of double dealing.⁹⁹

Poe had thus gained insight into the double nature characterising his second cousin, as his letter addressed to Joseph Evans Snodgrass shows the open contempt that Poe felt towards his cousin Neilson at the time. However, this apparent hatred seemed rooted in an even more personal dispute that had taken place a few years before.

⁹⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Neilson Poe.” (New York, 8th August 1845. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: The Gordian Press, 1966): 292.

⁹⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Joseph Evans Snodgrass.” (Philadelphia, 7th October 1839. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: The Gordian Press, 1966): 120.

As his aunt and future mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, disclosed to Poe in a letter dated 1835, Neilson had offered to take her daughter Virginia home to provide for her education. Apparently, Neilson believed his thirteen-year-old cousin Virginia was far too young to get married, and considered it convenient that she waited to be a wife given her exceptional youth.¹⁰⁰ Poe's immediate response was to reply to Maria Clemm's letter imploring her not to accept Neilson's offer, ultimately declaring his most devoted love for his young cousin Virginia. Judging from his words, Poe felt naturally threatened and firmly believed that Neilson had approached Maria Clemm with the mere purpose of preventing any of his advances towards Virginia. Unsurprisingly, Poe thus took Neilson's action as a personal affront. However, his heart-breaking plea to his aunt Maria Clemm not to accept Neilson's request, in a letter dated 29th August 1835, finally had its intended effect, and Virginia did not go to live with Neilson Poe and his wife. And yet, from then onwards, this personal dispute would determine the relationship established between Poe and Neilson, even though, it might also be claimed that, owing to Neilson's demand, Poe felt for the first time obliged to openly confess his love for his future wife Virginia.

This actual romantic contest between Poe and Neilson for Virginia seemed ultimately transposed into fiction in Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," inasmuch as Sir Patrick O'Grandison's advances towards Mistress Tracle appear to be further encouraged by the Frenchman's intentions to court her. Accordingly, Poe and his cousin Neilson turned into counterparts of one another, since, both apparently sought to mirror each other in their search for what they found themselves to be lacking, and in this sense, it might be argued that, as double figures, through the scorn they showed for one another, they were in reality performing acts of self-contempt. Hence, this irony can be perceived in Poe's comic grotesques, in which Neilson often seems to impersonate a historical *alter ego*, that of Napoleon Bonaparte, responding to his qualities of pretence and self-importance as exemplified by characters in Poe's tales "The Spectacles," in which the protagonist claims that his Christian name

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 219.

is Napoleon Bonaparte, and “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling,” in which the Frenchman eventually adopts Napoleon’s famous pose. The parallelism between Neilson Poe and Napoleon can also be retrieved from Poe’s letters, in which he often refers to his cousin Neilson using his initials – N. Poe – given its resemblance with the first name of the French general. Likewise, this bond forged between Neilson Poe and Napoleon was further stretched through the ironic fact that the name of Neilson’s wife, as was the case with that of Napoleon, was also Josephine.

Even though Poe seemed to ironically bring to the fore the resonant parallelism between the names of his cousin Neilson Poe and that of the French general – apparently to turn Neilson Poe into an object of scorn in his comic satires – this purported connection between Napoleon and Neilson Poe not only seems to underline the rivalry between Edgar and his cousin, but ironically, it also reveals their attachment as double figures. In fact, in the last years of his life, Poe grew particularly fond of sitting to have his daguerreotype taken, and in the early summer of 1849, that is, in the last year of his life, two plates of Poe’s image were produced as a result of a sitting held in Lowell, Massachusetts. One of these plates became known as the ‘Stella’ daguerreotype, owned by the poet Sarah Anna Lewis, while the other plate, with only some slight variations in the pose, became known as the ‘Annie’ daguerreotype, as it was given to Annie Richmond, one of Poe’s beloved women at that stage in his life. According to Michael Deas, in 1876, years after Poe’s death, Annie Richmond commented on this daguerreotype, stating that the image almost seemed a caricature of Poe.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Michael J. Deas. “The ‘Annie’ Daguerreotype.” *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 47.



Figure 4 - Poe in the 'Annie' daguerreotype, in 1849.

Taken from: Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 49.

In fact, in this image, Poe seemed to be playing a character, staring defiantly at the onlooker and holding his hand in a sling half-concealed under his waistcoat, definitely emulating Napoleon Bonaparte's distinctive gesture. It is significant as well as ironic that Poe intended to emulate the French general, especially given the inherent parallelism he had apparently established between this historical character and his second cousin Neilson, his rival as well as his double figure.

In fact, Poe's gesture in this plate would prove prophetic again as, some months later, upon Poe's death, his cousin Neilson would play an important role in making arrangements for Poe's funeral, as he paid for the hearse and headstone of his cousin's grave, and even helped to transport Poe's body. Likewise, it was also Neilson who sent Maria Clemm a letter, dated 11th October 1849, informing her about the tragic demise of her nephew and son-in-law, even though, while trying to console her, he also declared that "Edgar had seen so much of sorrow – had so little reason to be satisfied

with life – that, to him, the change can scarcely be said to be a misfortune.”¹⁰² Neilson’s harsh but honest words ultimately unveiled his blatant opinion about his late cousin Poe, and yet, the role that he played in Poe’s life underscores that his presence exerted an important influence on Poe and the literary pieces that he was to write with biographical references to his opponent as well as double figure in actual life.

In search of domesticity: Ellen Glanville, Rosina Wheeler, and Virginia Clemm

Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Pelham* and Poe’s tale “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling” depict the coming-out in society of characters through their interaction with female socialites, and male opponents that turn into rivals as well as double figures. In the course of their social interactions, both Henry Pelham and Sir Patrick O’Grandison gradually leave behind their attraction towards female socialites and become increasingly captivated by females that rather typify the role of ‘the domestic woman’ or ‘the angel of the house.’ Drawing on biographical accounts, Poe had to abandon his hopes of marrying Sarah Elmira Royster and ultimately grew attached to his young cousin Virginia, while, similarly, Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled to forget his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, as his attention was gradually turned to her protégée, Rosina Doyle Wheeler. Both authors’ ultimate choice in their personal lives transcends in their fiction as, in Poe’s tale, Sir Patrick O’Grandison eventually becomes aware of his mistake in courting Mistress Tracle, while, correspondingly, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Henry Pelham also leaves behind his relationship with Lady Roseville, as he grows gradually attracted to Reginald Glanville’s sister, Ellen.

In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Henry Pelham and his friend as well as opponent Reginald Glanville gradually become closely related to one another through their respective relationships with Ellen, inasmuch as she is Glanville’s sister and Pelham’s prospective wife. When Pelham meets Ellen for the first time, he feels immediately attracted to her, but it is during the course of a visit to Reginald Glanville’s residence that Pelham is able to recognise in his friend’s sister the same attractive young woman

¹⁰² Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 436.

that he has already started to feel affection for. On account of their first encounter, Pelham provides an accurate description of Ellen Glanville, as a girl blossoming into womanhood:

She was somewhat, but not much, taller than the ordinary height; and her figure, which united all the first freshness and youth of the girl with the more luxuriant graces of the woman, was rounded and finished so justly, that the eye could glance over the whole, without discovering the least harshness or unevenness, or atom to be added or subtracted. But over all these was a light, a glow, a pervading spirit, of which it is impossible to convey the faintest idea.¹⁰³

Judging from this portrayal, Ellen Glanville immediately strikes Pelham for her innocence and remarkable lack of sophistication, which stands in clear contrast with other women he has met in Paris, and especially, with Lady Roseville, who are, for the most part, depicted as inherently born socialites.

As a case in point, while being initiated into Parisian society, Pelham becomes acquainted with the Duchess of Perpignan, one of the most highly-praised women in Paris, whom Pelham begins to court in order to make a name for himself in social circles. In a highly comical passage in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, during the course of a visit to the Duchess, her husband arrives unexpectedly, and Pelham is consequently obliged to hide away in her private chamber. This unexpected occurrence allows Pelham to gain insight into the deceit and pretence that also characterise courting, as he is granted the chance to take notice of the ludicrous articles of clothing that the Duchess makes use of in order to improve her appearance; namely, a night-cap, a golden wig, and even, sardonically, a set of false teeth. By means of this ironic while revelatory scene, Pelham realises the Duchess' apparently attractive looks respond, for the most part, to the use of artefacts of beauty, and hence gains insight into the simulated and forged qualities that may in truth characterise good looks, which are ultimately found to be conditioned by cultural as well as by social dictates. The ultimate constructed quality of femininity as represented by female socialites in this scene of *Pelham* is also ludicrously explored in Poe's sardonic tale "The Spectacles," in which the male

¹⁰³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 109.

protagonist is also able to detect all the utensils that Madame Lalande makes use of in order to look younger in spite of her actual advanced age.

Conversely, Ellen Glanville seems to lack the pretence and sophistication pertaining to the social circles in which Pelham usually interacts, and this is precisely what seems to draw him closer to Reginald's sister. In the course of their encounters, their interactions in society seem to respond to rules strictly regulating social intercourse, whereby mostly Pelham, Lady Roseville, Reginald Glanville and his sister Ellen come together, and socialise with each other. In this respect, the spatial context in which Pelham situates himself in the course of his interactions is highly indicative of the way he feels towards the respective individuals he socialises with. Having learned about the rules that regulate social interactions, Pelham thus takes advantage of them and takes part in a scene that is highly remindful of Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," insofar as the physical distribution of the characters – that is, Sir Patrick, Mistress Tracle, and the Frenchman – in the scene of the sofa is concerned. Indeed, in this significantly telling scene, Pelham frequently seeks to place himself by Ellen's side, while noticing that Lady Roseville also locates herself on the other side of Ellen, hence drawing closer to her, while observing how Reginald Glanville sits apart, absorbed in his thoughts. This spatial distribution, through adjustments of proximity and detachment, distinctly reveals how the individuals taking part in the interaction relate to each other. In this sense, Pelham feels gradually attracted towards Ellen, thus sitting by her side, while Lady Roseville, having been formerly attached to Pelham, now draws herself closer to Ellen in an attempt to be intimate with her, as Pelham perceives Lady Roseville feels increasingly attracted towards Ellen's brother. Hence, it can be contended that this spatial distribution becomes highly symbolic of the characters' motivations in the course of their social interactions, as well as the relations they establish with one another.

Subsequently, though, in spite of Pelham's growing feelings towards Ellen Glanville, when he begins to suspect her brother might be guilty of murder, his behaviour towards her begins to effect an important change, mostly owing to prejudices and fears of social ostracism. This again becomes highly noticeable in the way Pelham

positions himself in his interactions with respect to Ellen from then onwards. In this sense, as he refuses to shake hands with her brother, Pelham also seems to constantly distance himself from Ellen, often choosing to sit by Lady Roseville instead. As Pelham himself openly reveals in the course of one interaction, "Ellen was sitting on the other side of Lady Roseville; there was a vacant chair next to her, but I avoided it, and seated myself on the other side of Lady Roseville."¹⁰⁴ Hence, Pelham literally adjusts his spatial location, modulating his position according to his affection or disaffection with other individuals, mostly basing his judgments on impressions which he gradually learns to decode, and ultimately, dismiss as eminently deceitful. In fact, once Reginald Glanville is acquitted of his criminal charges, Pelham is able to see Ellen again in her true light, and correspondingly, he makes amends and renews his engagement, well aware of having mistaken her for what she actually is not.

Drawing on biographical accounts, through social interaction, these scenes describing the courting of Henry Pelham and Ellen Glanville in Bulwer-Lytton's novel are significantly remindful of the tempestuous relationship of the author himself with his wife-to-be Rosina. In fact, the couple first met each other at a literary tea-party rather unexpectedly, as both had been first reluctant to attend: Rosina on account of a bad cold, and Bulwer-Lytton due to his recent arrival in London after having been abroad. When she first met Bulwer-Lytton, Rosina was twenty-three and, according to David Lytton Cobbold, she was "tall with an exquisite complexion, dark hair, and bright grey, or, as she called them, green eyes, sparkling and changing with every emotion."¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, as opposed to Bulwer-Lytton, who for the most part exhibited a grandiloquent style as a dandified youth, Rosina, in spite of her brightness and loquacity, was apparently the epitome of plainness and simplicity. In this respect, as Robert Lytton argued in his father's biography, when his parents first met, Bulwer-Lytton, priding himself on his gifts as an observer, noticed that, in Rosina's manner

¹⁰⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Pelham; or, the Adventures of a Gentleman*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848): 203.

¹⁰⁵ David Lytton Cobbold. *A Blighted Marriage: The Life of Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, Irish Beauty, Satirist and Tormented Victorian Wife 1802-1882*. (Knebworth: Knebworth House Education and Preservation Trust, 1992): 2.

toward him, “there was something unconventional, which he interpreted as the artless manifestation of a frank, fearless, unsophisticated nature,”¹⁰⁶ in significantly clear resemblance with the character of Ellen Glanville in *Pelham*. Judging from Robert Lytton’s words, given his mother’s upbringing and family background in Ireland, Rosina was somehow detached from the rigid conventions that strictly regulated the London social circles that she then began to frequent.

In resemblance with the social encounters between Pelham and Ellen depicted in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, the two years stretching from the date that Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina Doyle Wheeler first met in 1825 until they finally got married in August 1827 were also characterised by, to use Michael Sadleir’s words, a “drama of conflicting human inclinations,”¹⁰⁷ with four principal actors, they being Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Rosina Doyle Wheeler, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton and Lady Caroline Lamb, who appear to find their literary counterparts in Henry Pelham, Ellen Glanville, Mrs Cunningham, and Lady Roseville, respectively. During the spring of 1826, Bulwer-Lytton would constantly leave Knebworth to meet Rosina in London, where she was often accompanied by her close friend Caroline Lamb, who greatly supported the emergent relationship established between Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina, inviting them frequently to join her at her residence in Broomfield Park.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, in clear contrast with Lady Caroline’s will to join both of her friends, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton took an unfavourable view of her son’s infatuation with Rosina. Apparently, Bulwer-Lytton’s mother disapproved of their engagement on account of different reasons, such as Rosina’s “forlorn childhood, and unguided upbringing,”¹⁰⁹ as well as her condition as a “woman unlikely to bring him happiness.”¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton’s mother

¹⁰⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 37.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Sadleir. *Bulwer: A Panorama.* (London: Constable, 1931): 88.

¹⁰⁸ Broomfield Hall is a red brick neoclassical house set in Broomfield Hall Park and Garden at the northern end of the urban area of Hatfield, Hertfordshire, in England. Sir Matthew Lamb, first Baronet, purchased the estate in 1746. One of the owners of the house was William Lamb, second viscount Melbourne, who was Queen Victoria’s first Prime Minister from 1835 to 1841. His wife, Lady Caroline Lamb, had a famous affair with Lord Byron, causing her husband, Lord Melbourne, much embarrassment.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 39.

¹¹⁰ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton.* (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 7.

mostly accused her prospective daughter-in-law of having deceived them with regard to her true age. According to Michael Sadleir, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton contended that Rosina was “two years older than she pretended,”¹¹¹ and she was so convinced that Rosina was much older than she professed to be that even “special messengers were despatched to Ireland to obtain documentary evidence of the date of Rosina’s birth.”¹¹² To defend her protégée of whom she was literary executor, in Rosina’s biography, Louisa Devey asserted that Rosina was in fact only six months Bulwer-Lytton’s senior, and she went even further, stating that Bulwer-Lytton would make use of this apparent disparity in age subsequently in his life, since, to use Louisa Devey’s words, “he succeeded in inducing numbers of his friends to believe that he had thrown himself away in boyhood upon a woman old enough to be his mother.”¹¹³

In a way not dissimilar to how Pelham acts with regard to Ellen Glanville owing to social prejudices in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, due to his mother’s strong opposition to their relationship, Bulwer-Lytton also felt obliged to draw his engagement to Rosina to an end only to renew it again soon after. Different critics suggest disparate reasons that might account for the eventual restitution of the couple’s relationship. As a case in point, James Campbell estimates that Bulwer-Lytton restored their engagement when he found out that Rosina was ill and bitterly suffering for his sake. Conversely, rather than regarding her as a victim, Michael Sadleir argues that Rosina decided to approach Bulwer-Lytton “and then tempt him, by non-resistance at a critical moment, to commit himself,”¹¹⁴ thus arguing that Rosina was determined to marry Bulwer-Lytton even if her virtue might have been at stake. Despite this notorious disparity of opinions, partly through guilt and partly through his fondness for Rosina, Bulwer-Lytton’s ultimate resolution to get married also led him to address his mother in a letter, admonishing her that “even the most sensible persons may sometimes err through prejudice in their

¹¹¹ Michael Sadleir. *Bulwer: A Panorama*. (London: Constable, 1931): 99.

¹¹² Louisa Devey. *Life of Rosina, Lady Lytton with Numerous Extracts from her MS. Autobiography and Other Original Documents*. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Company, Paternoster Square, 1887): 69.

¹¹³ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 7.

¹¹⁴ Michael Sadleir. *Bulwer: A Panorama*. (London: Constable, 1931): 96.

harshness of their judgement,”¹¹⁵ but it would not be until much later that Bulwer-Lytton would ultimately find out that his mother’s verdict had actually been right at the time.

Bulwer-Lytton’s courting of socialites, his choice of a wife as an apparent ‘angel of the house,’ and the social prejudices – also on account of age – that he had to bear on account of his wife also befell Poe at this stage of his life. Just like Bulwer-Lytton eventually met Rosina as a result of his previous relationship with Lady Caroline Lamb, since Rosina was actually considered her protégée, before Poe married his cousin Virginia Clemm, he had also courted other women, mainly socialites, and it was in the course of these relationships that he would eventually make the choice of his future wife. As previously shown, Poe’s social life was echoed in his satirical piece, “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling,” whereby Poe ironically portrays how two pretenders contend for the love of a female socialite, even though their mutual aim to gain her love, and thus possibly rise in society, ultimately ends in failure. Similarly, during his life, Poe had courted some socialites such as Sarah Elmira Royster while in Richmond, and later on, during his stay in Baltimore, he would also have a relationship with Mary Devereaux, thus underlining Poe’s ongoing interest in procuring for himself a high position in the social spectrum. Nevertheless, the woman he would finally marry, Virginia Clemm, apparently seemed far from matching the socialite types that he had met so far and would ever aspire to conquer, as happened to Bulwer-Lytton with regard to Rosina.

When Poe was discharged from the army, he moved to Baltimore where he lived in his aunt’s household for six years until he married his young cousin Virginia. It was there that he became acquainted with his future wife, who was only seven years old at the time. According to critic Dawn Sova, at such a young age, Virginia was described as “having brown hair and violet eyes and being a lively and somewhat plump child,”¹¹⁶ while biographer Peter Ackroyd draws attention to her doll-like condition, her pale complexion and her characteristic “raven hair to which Poe was instinctively

¹¹⁵ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883): 40.

¹¹⁶ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work.* (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 52.

attracted.”¹¹⁷ At the time, though, Poe simply treated Virginia as a young relative, since there is evidence that at the time Poe was having a relationship with a young neighbour of French origin named Mary Devereaux, who lived near the household of the Clemms, in the same way that Poe had also taken a fancy to his neighbour Sarah Elmira Royster when he lived with the Allans in Richmond, and also in the analogous way that Sir Patrick O’Grandison ultimately meets his neighbour Mistress Tracle in Poe’s sardonic tale. Surprisingly, young Virginia herself would play an important role in this relationship as she apparently acted as the messenger who carried the letters that Poe and Mary used to address to each other. Hence, the friendship established between Mary Devereaux and Virginia – and, in turn, their ultimate romantic connection with Poe – bears much resemblance with Bulwer-Lytton’s entanglement with Caroline Lamb first and his subsequent attachment to her close friend Rosina, precisely on account of the friendship relating both women.

Fulfilling the role of one of the female socialites in Poe’s life, Mary Devereaux finds her literary counterpart in Mistress Tracle in Poe’s tale “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling,” since, as happens in the story, the relationship that Poe had with Mary Devereaux was brief and ended abruptly, owing mainly to Poe’s erratic behaviour. As happened with his previous liaison with Sarah Elmira Royster, Mary Devereaux’s family also strongly objected to her relationship with Poe and, in this case, responding to Poe’s defiant confrontation, Mary’s uncle fiercely chased Poe, even ultimately tearing his frock coat as a result of their fight. This fierce conclusion to which Poe’s relationship finally came is also echoed in his satirical piece “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling,” whereby the Irish baronet, Sir Patrick O’Grandison, also takes revenge on the Frenchman for having offended him and threatened his manhood, in what appears to be Poe’s fictional revenge on this actual episode in his life.

Scarcely three years after his relationship with Mary Devereaux had come to an end, a significant turning-point took place which definitely changed Poe’s views on his young cousin Virginia. The reasons behind such change were unveiled in a letter, dated

¹¹⁷ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 48-49.

29th August 1835, addressed to his aunt Maria Clemm, in which Poe dejectedly referred back to his aunt's words in relation to Virginia's initiation in society, despondently worrying about the fact that his aunt had spoken "of Virginia acquiring accomplishments, and entering into society."¹¹⁸ From then onwards, Poe significantly began to see his young cousin Virginia in a different light, coming out in society, and therefore, not entirely different from the socialite women he had fallen for so far, such as Sarah Elmira Royster and Mary Devereaux. Likewise, the haunting presence of his cousin Neilson Poe, with his offer to take care of Virginia, was likely to have urged Poe to make up his mind to court her. As happens in his tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," Poe envisioned Neilson as an opponent to defeat as if in a sort of romantic confrontation, and like Sir Patrick O'Grandison with regard to the Frenchman, Poe also felt compelled to replicate Neilson's moves so as to get closer to Virginia. Hence, well aware of Neilson's feasible means to accomplish his purpose, and possibly out of envy, Poe felt necessarily obliged to retaliate by offering Virginia the same economic security that she would surely have enjoyed in Neilson's home, and it was under such strain that Poe would ultimately confess his love for Virginia in a pitiful letter addressed to his aunt Maria Clemm, feeling threatened by Neilson's long shadow:

I love, *you know* I love Virginia passionately, devotedly. I cannot express in words the fervent devotion I feel towards my dear little cousin – my own darling. But what can I say; oh think for me for I am incapable of thinking. All my thoughts are occupied with the supposition that both you and she will prefer to go with N. Poe; I do sincerely believe that your comforts will for the present be secured.¹¹⁹

Poe's letter reveals how he modulated the way he perceived Virginia, thus showing that Maria Clemm's letter and her boasting about Virginia's acquiring social ways was ultimately effective enough to convince Poe of the move he had to make, as scarcely nine months later, he and Virginia were already married, even if their marriage did not actually take place without impairments, especially on account of Virginia's remarkable

¹¹⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (29th August 1835. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: Gordian Press, 1966): 71.

¹¹⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (29th August 1835. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: Gordian Press, 1966): 69.

young age. Hence, significantly enough, both Poe and Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled to endure prevailing strong social prejudices with regard to age, insofar as, if Bulwer-Lytton had to face family prejudices against his wife Rosina on account of her being older than he was, Poe would also have to bear social ostracism as a result of having married a woman much younger than him.

His wife's age was notably the cause of much strain on Poe, particularly during their first years of marriage, as it was through his attachment to young Virginia that Poe could gain insight into the social standards of age, and by extension, the way age was culturally constructed, and therefore, how the perception of age could ultimately be transformed. As biographer Kenneth Silverman points out, Virginia's age "was extremely rare,"¹²⁰ as she got married when she was only thirteen years of age, while her husband, being twenty-six, was thirteen years her senior. Poe, however, was not only concerned about his wife's chronological young age as, in addition, her appearance was also claimed to match that of an even younger woman. In this sense, when Poe's sister, Rosalie Poe, often took Virginia to the school of her adoptive family, the Mackenzies, Poe's young wife was often mistaken for one of the other pupils at school, precisely owing to her evident youthful looks. Given Virginia's chronological youth and her exceptionally young-looking appearance, Poe was concerned about the public impression that may arise from marrying a childlike bride and, as evidence of this, he got into the frequent habit of misrepresenting Virginia's age. As a case in point, in a letter dated a few months prior to their marriage and addressed to John Pendleton Kennedy, Poe declared that Virginia was fifteen years of age.¹²¹ Likewise, in their marriage bond, dated 16th May 1836, it is clearly stated that the bride, Virginia Clemm, "was of the full age of twenty one years,"¹²² even if there is evidence to corroborate that, when they got married in Richmond, Virginia was actually fourteen, while, in a

¹²⁰ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 107.

¹²¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to John Pendleton Kennedy." (22nd January 1836. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: Gordian Press, 1966): 82.

¹²² Arthur Hobson Quinn. "Reproduction from Facsimile of the Original Marriage Bond in the Hustings Court of Richmond." *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 253.

previous ceremony, which had taken place secretly in Baltimore – precisely on account of Virginia’s unusual youth – she was merely thirteen years of age.

Poe’s deep concern about his wife’s young age ultimately had an effect on him and the way his age was perceived as well as how he presented himself in society according to prevailing standards of age. In this respect, Poe’s choice for his young cousin Virginia underscores his lifetime preference – with the exception of Jane Stanard in his early youth – for an idealised childlike woman, which, according to Kenneth Silverman, ultimately underpinned Poe’s immaturity at the time.¹²³ Detached from the Allans, Poe naturally felt dependent and became well aware that, in marrying Virginia, he would secure the lifetime protection of his aunt Maria Clemm, who would always act as a true mother to him. Likewise, Poe’s acute sense of helplessness and even ingenuousness was further emphasised by the author himself as, on several occasions in his life, he would present himself as younger than he actually was. Poe’s habit of altering his chronological age at the time mostly responded to better suit that of his wife, thus contributing to bridging the age-gap separating them.

As Kenneth Silverman notices, in his autobiographical note, in addition to lying about his age, Poe appeared to transform his life into “a tale of personal distinction, glamour, and power,”¹²⁴ which ultimately showed Poe’s deep concern about the sort of public persona he was to display in society. The author’s ongoing strain in this respect, which ultimately underlined Poe’s apprehension about public opinion, also frequently imbued his fiction, as was the case with his social satires such as “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling” and “The Spectacles.” As a matter of fact, in the former story, Sir Patrick O’Grandison portrays the Frenchman as an old man, but being ultimately double figures of each other, the Irish baronet fails to describe himself as aged. Likewise, but in the latter tale, a myopic narrator endows an ostensibly aged lady with the mistaken appearance of youth, thus ultimately drawing attention to the blurring limits separating youth from old age, and taking it for granted that impressions are often

¹²³ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 107.

¹²⁴ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 196.

essentially deceptive, and therefore, open to manipulation. Drawing on a biographical interpretation of "The Spectacles," it can be claimed that Poe fictionalised his lifetime concern about the disparity between Virginia's chronological age and her appearance, and upon the advent of her disease, the mismatch between her remarkably youthful appearance and her actual condition as a prematurely aged woman, as a result of her illness. As a case in point, in his best known poem dedicated to his then already late wife Virginia, "Annabel Lee" (1849), Poe underlined her characteristic childlike appearance and youth, and significantly, he also assigned those qualities to himself, thus declaiming:

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea;
But we loved with a love that was more than love
I and my Annabel Lee."¹²⁵

Virginia's distinctive youth would also be commonly noticed, even in the last days of her life, by the novelist Mary Neal Gove, who attended on Virginia during her terminal illness, and produced a description of her patient while the Poes lived in their cottage at Fordham, New York, placing emphasis on Virginia's youth but ephemeral condition:

Mrs Poe looked very young; she had large black eyes, and a pearly whiteness of complexion, which was a perfect pallor. Her pale face, her brilliant eyes, and her raven hair gave her an unearthly look. One felt that she was almost a disrobed spirit, and when she coughed it was made certain that she was rapidly passing away.¹²⁶

The sketch of Virginia that Mary Neal Gove wrote mostly drew attention to Virginia's oxymoronic features as extremely young, but vanishing from this world. In this respect,

¹²⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. "Annabel Lee." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. I: Poems*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969): 477-478, lines 7-10.

¹²⁶ This sketch of Virginia on behalf of Mary Neal Gove was first published in the journal *Six Penny Magazine* in February 1863. Quoted in Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 508.

Virginia's ultimate paradoxical condition as being young but dying would haunt Poe as a clear epitome of the literary figure of '*la morte amoureuse*,' which he would repeatedly explore in his tales about women that die and come back to life, and which had been addressed in previous literary works considered exponents of the Romantic movement, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem "Die Braut von Korinth" (1797), Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Christabel" (1797-1800), and Théophile Gautier's short-story "La Morte Amoureuse" (1836), to name a few of the best-known examples. Being of a spiritual rather than of a physical condition, Virginia would thus match the romantic epitome of '*la morte amoureuse*,' but given her gentle personality, and for the most part, her entirely dependent nature, she also typified the Victorian figure of 'the invalid' and of 'the angel of the house.' In any case, Virginia stood rather apart from the socialite types that Poe had courted during his adolescence and that he would ultimately feel compelled to leave behind, along with the alluring social prospects that he had nourished in youth. Hence, it can be argued that Virginia was essentially closer to Poe's ladies of fragile nature that would follow the trace left in infancy of the premature death of Poe's biological mother, Elizabeth Arnold, of his foster mother, Frances Allan, and of his first idealised love, Jane Stanard, whose memories would ever lead Poe back to his vanished youth.

* * *

A series of turning-points taking place during the coming-out in society of both authors – such as their early stays abroad, their interaction with female socialites, their rivalry with male double figures, and the meeting of their respective wives – underscore the way that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe approached their process of aging at this stage of their lives. Poe would show his taste for social satire, insofar as he envisioned tales such as "Why the Little Frenchman Wears his Hand in a Sling" in which characters come out in society, and learn about social conventions as well as the way to project themselves in their social intercourse. Likewise, at this stage, Bulwer-Lytton would also envision the novel that gave rise to the silver-fork genre, *Pelham*, which portrays the conduct and

mannerism of the members of the aristocratic social set in the course of their social interactions. In these fictions, characters such as Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison take part in social gatherings and gain insight into the intricacies regulating the presentation of 'the Self' in society. Through their social intercourse, they learn about – and also show contempt for – the importance attached to appearance and perception, since the public image that an individual projects ultimately proves deceptive or subjected to manipulation, as Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison demonstrate by means of modulating the way they present themselves in society. In this respect, these characters unveil the deceitful quality of social interaction and how individuals are taught to construct their images and the way they present themselves according to social and cultural standards.

In the course of their social interactions, the characters of Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison are initiated socially through their respective relationships with prototypes of the female socialite, as is the case of Lady Roseville and Mistress Tracle, while these fictional relationships reflect the actual attachment of the authors to female socialites such as Caroline Lamb and Sarah Elmira Royster. Like Pelham and O'Grandison in the narratives, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe came out in society through their affairs with female socialites that would allow the authors to gain insight into the intricacies of social interaction, how they projected their image in society, and how they were expected to act according to their age and social class. This theatrical quality which characterises social interaction also allowed the authors to emulate social prototypes to which they aspired, since, through his relation with Caroline Lamb, Bulwer-Lytton tried to emulate his much-admired Lord Byron in his youth, while, by means of his early attachment to Sarah Elmira Royster, Poe also aspired to become part of the upper social classes of the city of Richmond and sanction his role as a Southern gentleman. Nonetheless, the end of their respective affairs with these female socialites eventually allows Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison to gain further insight into the counterfeited quality of social intercourse and to leave behind their social aspirations to become more self-conscious and to make a step forward in their aging processes. Similarly, after their respective affairs with Caroline Lamb and Sarah Elmira Royster,

Bulwer-Lytton and Poe awoke further into their present reality and grew more cynical and detached from society, as their satirical fictions about social life at the time showed.

Their fictions *Pelham* and “Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling” also reflect the sojourns of the authors in foreign countries and their socialising in cities such as Paris and London, as Henry Pelham and Patrick O’Grandison gain insight into the way to act in a foreign society. Being more explicitly aware of the way to act in society in a foreign environment, Poe grew especially conscious of social class and mannerisms during his stay in England and upon his return to Richmond, while Bulwer-Lytton grew more acquainted with socialising and the prevailing cult of the dandy in Paris. As a result of socialising, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe also grew more concerned about their appearance and the way they projected their image in their social interactions, as Bulwer-Lytton took great care of his looks, while Poe began to have his daguerreotype taken on a number of occasions. This concern about their appearance came hand-in-hand with their growing concern about aging, as is reflected in their social fictions. As evidence of this social as well as age consciousness, in a number of scenes in the fictions, characters are portrayed peering at themselves in the mirror – looking at their aged double – inasmuch as Henry Pelham stares at himself in the disguise of an old monk and also beholds the changes in the appearance of his friend and antagonist Reginald Glanville, while Patrick O’Grandison emulates the moves of the Frenchman whom he describes as an old man and in whom he mirrors himself. These scenes in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel and Poe’s tale are ultimately indicative of the aging process of their main characters, as well as of the social dimension of aging, since characters are portrayed as literally aging through the figure of ‘the other.’ In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Henry Pelham is eager to remove his make-up as an old monk, while, in Poe’s tale, Sir Patrick O’Grandison fails to recognise his aging traits, even if he is able to identify them in his double. Hence, the socially constructed perception of aging and the prejudices against age ultimately condition the characters’ personal perception of their process of aging. Likewise, the characters of Reginald Glanville and the Frenchman, who act as antagonists of the male heroes, Pelham and Patrick O’Grandison, also find their actual counterpart in Bulwer-Lytton’s friend, Frederick Villiers, and Poe’s cousin, Neilson

Poe, as they were closely acquainted with the authors but also had disagreements with them, thus becoming symbolic double figures of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, respectively. Their discontinuous relation with the authors also reflects the aging process of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, as the authors could compare themselves with the metaphorical fall of Frederick Villiers and the symbolic rise of Neilson Poe, and judge their success in life as they grew aged.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, *Pelham*, the male protagonist eventually learns to leave behind his romantic attachment to Lady Roseville, who initiates him in the constructed art of socialising, and begins to feel attracted to Ellen Glanville, who complies with the Victorian prototype of 'the angel of the house.' Similarly, after the end of their affair with female socialites such as Caroline Lamb and Sarah Elmira Royster, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe got acquainted with their prospective wives, who differed quite ostensibly from their former partners, and supposedly, matched the prevailing Victorian prototype of the woman as 'the angel of the house.' However, as time would tell, both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe gradually witnessed how their wives gradually detached themselves from this Victorian prototype, even if for different reasons, as Virginia would match the Victorian archetype of the invalid, while Bulwer-Lytton would eventually consider Rosina as a fallen woman, which would even propitiate her enclosure in a lunatic asylum. Likewise, the social perception of the age of Bulwer-Lytton's and Poe's respective wives also exerted a significant influence on the way the authors would envision their process of aging. Bulwer-Lytton had to face his family's prejudice due to the fact that his wife, Rosina, was older than him, and consequently, through the social gaze, he was deemed younger in comparison. Conversely, though, Poe had to face strong prejudices against his wife's unusual youth, which, consequently, rendered him too aged by social standards to be her husband. As shown above, this biased judgement on account of age often resulted in Poe's lying about his wife's age and even about his own. Drawing on the constructed quality of the presentation of 'the self' as well as of the cultural perception of aging, Poe would often feel the need to present himself as younger than his actual chronological age.

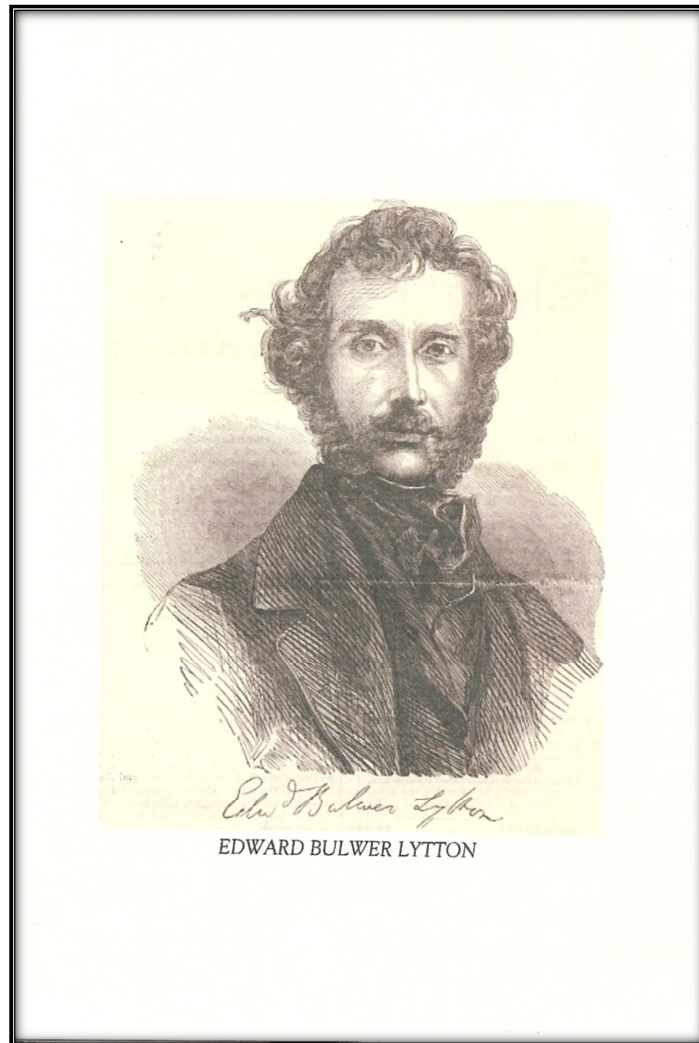


Figure 5 - Portrait of Edward Bulwer-Lytton appearing in the magazine *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilisation* 5.241, in New York, on 10th August 1861.

Chapter Three

Growing Up and Apart: the Process of Individuation in *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd”

The earliest narratives of crime that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe wrote, *Paul Clifford* (1830) and “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), appeared when their authors were around thirty years of age, and both literary fictions address crime as a metaphor of the individual’s struggle against social collectiveness. In his novel, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to claim that the social establishment can contribute to giving shape to a criminal, since, the main character in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Paul, eventually resorts to crime in order to vindicate having been unjustly accused of a theft. In the same way, being an abducted child of unknown origins, and acquiring a dual identity that makes him swing between the upper and lower classes in the social spectrum both as a highwayman and a socialite, Paul ultimately underpins the blurring boundaries separating vulgar from fashionable crime.¹ If *Paul Clifford* becomes Bulwer-Lytton’s first novel featuring a hero who is also a criminal, “The Man of the Crowd” is considered one of Poe’s earliest tales of crime, as its narrator feels increasingly fascinated by an aged stranger, who appears to wander aimlessly along the crowded streets of the city of London in order to make up for an unknown crime, while the narrator finds himself emulating the stranger and sharing his alienation as an individual in an urban environment.

The clash between social conformity and individual rebellion that is brought to the fore in these narratives finds its counterpart in the personal circumstances befalling both authors at this stage of their lives, which placed them at a juncture between their alliance to social collectiveness and their independence as individuals, and ultimately,

¹ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 41.

gave shape to an important turning-point in their lives that would prompt their process of aging. As a result of his personal decision to marry Rosina Wheeler against his mother's will, Bulwer-Lytton became increasingly detached from his mother, while, under the menace of disinheritance, he felt compelled to write profusely in order to make a living. Likewise, in order to face his social duties as a politician, he went to live in the city of London with his family, where he also felt compelled to please his wife's turn for attending social gatherings. Similarly, after the tragic demise of his foster mother, Frances Allan, Poe grew increasingly estranged from the Allan household, and having a family of his own upon his marriage to Virginia Clemm, he felt compelled to succeed in his profession as a writer as well as an editor, and to that end, he moved to a series of large cities such as Philadelphia and New York, which would ultimately sanction his independence as an individual and his estrangement from the Allan family.

The dichotomy established between social collectiveness and individualism that is tackled in both Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* and Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd," as suggestive of the changes that both authors were undergoing at the time, can be explored through the analysis of the individuation process that befalls the protagonists of both fictions, their increasing dissatisfaction with the collectivity as shown by their decision to indulge in criminal behaviour, their displeasure with names that they associate with a particular social group or kin, and the ultimate effect that being expatriated and living in a foreign environment has on them as individuals. The examination of these issues ultimately underscores the shift in focus from social collectiveness to emphatic individualism that the protagonists endure as a result of their experiences, which are indicative of the progress of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe onto the next stage in the course of aging, thus drawing the conclusion that the process of attaining adulthood necessarily involves a process of individuation.

The individuation process as integrating the collective and the personal

As a result of personal circumstances befalling Bulwer-Lytton and Poe at the time, such as living in large cities and feeling estranged from their respective families, it can be claimed that both authors underwent a process of individuation at this stage of their

lives, and this progression was also transferred into the fiction they wrote at the time, such as *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd,” inasmuch as the main characters find themselves facing the schism established between the individual and the collectivity, while secrets from their past that are gradually unveiled play a major role in defining and conditioning their identity. The individuation process is regarded as a key concept within Carl Jung’s analytical psychology,² and it involves the self-realisation of individuals and the process whereby they attain maturity and discover who they really are. In this respect, following Carl Jung’s definition of individuation, this psychological process brings about the development of the individual as being distinct from the collective.³ This process thus entails the interplay of opposites, such as the personal and the collective, while it also implies their integration,⁴ thus showing that the individuation process is also dependent on relationships with others. Accordingly, the process of individuation involves an on-going progression in the course of aging of individuals which turns from succumbing to collective norms to surrendering to the domain of the personal.

Shortly after his marriage, Poe went to live in a series of large cities, such as New York and Philadelphia, with the aim of expanding his career prospects as an editor and as a writer, and it was in this urban environment that the image of Poe, pacing along the streets of different capitals, metaphorically underlined his individuality in front of the crowd. Likewise, by means of having a family of his own, Poe also certified his detachment from the Allans, with whom he had been closely connected for most of his life, thus sanctioning his independence as an adult as well as his withdrawal from the social and family group to which he had been formerly attached. In a similar way, following his marriage to Rosina Wheeler, Bulwer-Lytton went to live in London, where, in his roles as a politician and as a writer, he felt obliged to socialise with members of the political parties, as well as with his different acquaintances in the

² Carl Gustav Jung. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. (Aniela Jaffé. Ed. New York: Random House, 1989): 209.

³ Carl Gustav Jung. *Psychological Types. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, vol. VI*. (Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull. Eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976): 448-450.

⁴ Carl Gustav Jung. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, vol. VII*. (Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull. Eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

literary sphere, and yet, he would often find himself longing for the isolation he needed in order to write, thus gaining insight into the schism that divided his attachment to the collectivity and his will to underline his individuality. Likewise, having married against his mother's wishes, for the first time in his life, Bulwer-Lytton felt estranged from his family, and having been menaced with being disinherited, he also found himself having to write in order to earn a living and become economically independent, thus having to face his financial duties on his own. Accordingly, at this stage of their lives, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe gained awareness of the increasing gap between the collectivity and their individual identity, and as indicative of this situation, their literary fictions at the time, *Paul Clifford* and "The Man of the Crowd," also focus on individuals who, in spite of being initially ascribed to a particular faction within the social spectrum, increasingly feel ostracised and become detached from this collectivity, which ultimately sanctions their process of individuation and their wish to emphasise their individuality before the collectivity.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Paul is totally unaware of his actual origins, and his connection with the collectivity permanently swings from being a criminal to becoming a highly reputed member of the upper social classes. Nonetheless, his ultimate choice to start a new life in a different country and raise his own family abroad eventually marks his process of individuation and his final detachment from the collectiveness to which he had been formerly ascribed. Similarly, in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," the narrator also swings from the fancy environment of a coffee shop, where he enjoys his time of leisure, to the street where he merges with the crowd, but in both environments the narrator arises as the embodiment of the figure of the individual, of the observer, who finds in the man of the crowd his double or counterpart. Hence, the narrator also undergoes a process of individuation, since, even though he merges with different factions from the social spectrum, he finds himself emulating the man that stands out in the crowd, and in spite of the man's will to mingle with the crowd and thus conceal his presence, he inevitably becomes more noticeable in the midst of the multitude that strolls along the street.

Likewise, in addition to the process whereby the collective ultimately succumbs to the singular, Carl Jung's concept of the individuation process also consists in the transformational progression of integrating the conscious within 'the personal unconscious' and 'the collective unconscious,'⁵ taking into consideration that 'the ego' constitutes the conscious mind, 'the personal unconscious' includes forgotten or suppressed memories from one's personal life, and 'the collective unconscious' responds to the collective memory shared by the collectivity and comprises the archetypes, which consist in universal and mythical characters that are shared by the collectivity. According to Jung's model, 'the self' is the centre of the individual's psyche around which revolves 'the ego,' which entails one's conscious self-image, and 'the shadow,' which involves the individual's denied psychic material. Likewise, through 'the ego,' 'the self' is propelled to the outer world, that is, towards the collectivity – in which 'the self' finds the archetype of 'the persona,' which consists in the individual's projected image or mask – while, through 'the shadow,' 'the self' is pulled towards the inner world, that is, the unconscious.

Drawing on Jung's model, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Paul's 'ego' has to integrate 'the personal unconscious' and 'the collective unconscious' in order to fulfil his individuation process. In this respect, Paul's 'personal unconscious,' inasmuch as it comprises his suppressed memories, entails his lack of knowledge about his actual origins, which problematizes his identity, until it is finally revealed at the end of the novel. Likewise, Paul's 'collective unconscious' leads him to oscillate between his connection with the upper and lower classes within the social spectrum, thus integrating different habits and behaviour patterns that are collectively associated with these different social factions until he finally asserts his individual positioning with respect to the collectivity. Hence, following Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concept of 'habitus,' the main character in Bulwer-Lytton's novel gradually internalises a set of acquired habits and daily practices that are associated with different social groups, insofar as the 'habitus' is defined as the objectification of social structures at the level of the

⁵ Carl Gustav Jung. *Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia, vol. II.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962): 301.

individual subjectivity,⁶ and by means of displaying these social practices, he also contributes to reproducing the social structures attached to the opposite social groups that he associates himself with. Moreover, Paul's ego is also pulled towards the collectivity by effect of the archetype of 'the persona,' inasmuch as he adopts a projected image or a social mask in the course of his interactions in which he plays the role of a member of the privileged classes. Nonetheless, Paul's ego is also propelled towards the repressed instincts in his unconscious through the archetype of 'the shadow,' insofar as, having been unjustly imprisoned for a crime he has not committed, he ultimately decides to succumb to a life of crime.

In Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd," the narrator also goes through an individuation process as his 'personal unconscious' as well as his 'collective unconscious' gradually integrate in his 'ego' or 'conscious mind.' At the beginning of his account, the narrator admits that he "had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, [while he also] found [him]self in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui*."⁷ By means of making explicit reference to his disposition, the narrator is discussing his 'personal unconscious,' especially inasmuch as he does not reveal the actual reason for being in a bad or a good mood. Likewise, he also refers to the 'collective unconscious,' as he depicts his social habits while he indulges in leisure at a coffee shop, thus also pointing at his ascription to a determinate social group. As illustrative of how 'the ego' is pulled to the outer world by the archetype of 'the persona' and to the inner world by the archetype of 'the shadow,' in Poe's tale, in his convalescence, the narrator is literally pulled towards the collectivity and puts on his social mask while he stays in the coffee shop, even if, significantly, he also sticks to his individuality as he does not appear to socialise with anyone. Suddenly, he grows increasingly fascinated by the figure of the man of the crowd, who, given his association with the world of crime, becomes the embodiment of 'the shadow' and pulls the narrator towards his darker inner world, as he

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Man of the Crowd." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 507.

ultimately finds himself emulating the moves of the man of the crowd. Nonetheless, as happens in the coffee shop, where the narrator sanctions his association with the upper classes but does not interact with them, in the streets, even if the narrator merges with the mob, he also holds on to his individuality, as he stands out in the multitude to the same extent that the man of the crowd also does.

Accordingly, as the characters come to terms with the ‘personal unconscious’ and the ‘collective unconscious,’ and integrate them into their ‘ego,’ that is, their conscious mind, they fulfil their individuation process, and their individuality ultimately prevails with respect to the collectivity. The individuation process that the characters enact in *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd” is also suggestive of the stage in the course of aging that both authors, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, were going through at the time. In both *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd,” Paul as well as the man that the narrator pursues in the street are accused of having committed theft, and this particular crime – the act of stealing – acquires significant connotations from a biographical perspective, inasmuch as it sheds light on one particular episode in the life of both authors, as will be subsequently revealed, which also gave shape to the authors’ ‘personal unconscious.’ Likewise, at this particular stage in their lives, their gradual detachment from their respective families would mark a period of transition in which both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe fluctuated between their former allegiance to their family group, which would also bring to the fore their ‘collective unconscious,’ and the onset of their affective and economic independence. In relation to the connection of ‘the self,’ that is, one’s conscious self-image, with ‘the persona’ – the individual’s social mask – and ‘the shadow’ – the unconscious – which propels the individual outwards and inwards respectively, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe also gained awareness into the schism that gradually separated their public from their private lives, as they sealed their alliances with their particular ‘persona’ and ‘shadow.’ In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton felt required to indulge in the social gatherings he frequently attended in the City of London, thus often making use of his ‘persona’ or ‘social mask,’ but he also needed isolation in order to give vent to his imagination – his ‘shadow’ – in order to write. Similarly, Poe also became closely acquainted with the literary circles of the large cities where he lived at

the time, thus giving shape to the ‘mask’ that he metaphorically put on in social interactions, even though his ‘shadow’ would always remain a close companion for life, inasmuch as repressed memories from the past came back to torment him, especially with regard to his former connection with the Allan family at this stage of his life. Hence, in the case of both writers, the gradual integration between the ‘personal unconscious’ and the ‘collective unconscious’ that took place contributed to giving shape to their ‘egos’ or ‘conscious minds’ at the time and unleashed their processes of individuation, which would allow them to advance to the following stage in the course of aging.

In the same way, the individuation process, which so far has been tackled in the psychological domain in order to gain insight into the progression of both authors and their respective characters at this stage, also finds its reflection in the philosophical ideas that were taking shape in the course of these years of the Victorian period, as is the case with Utilitarianism, insofar as this philosophical movement also discussed the relationship between the personal and the collective. As Maureen Moran claims, Utilitarianism ultimately judged right and wrong by the pleasure and pain derived from an act for the highest number of individuals.⁸ Nonetheless, in spite of placing emphasis on the benefit of the collectivity, it is also worth noticing that, Jeremy Bentham, who has been widely considered as the founder of the movement, described the principle of utility as “that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question.”⁹ Judging from these words, the Utilitarian precepts preached that social progress depended on the fulfilment of each citizen, and in this sense, in spite of its evident social component, that Utilitarianism also placed emphasis on individual self-interest and freedom, which shaped, to use Maureen Moran’s words, “the Victorian obsession with individualism.”¹⁰ In this respect, one of the most influential philosophers in Victorian times, John Stuart Mill, in his seminal volume *On*

⁸ Maureen Moran. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. (London: Continuum, 2006): 33.

⁹ Jeremy Bentham. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. (Dover: Dover Publications, 2007): 1.

¹⁰ Maureen Moran. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. (London: Continuum, 2006): 34.

Liberty (1859), claimed that the way to reform society was to maximise individual freedom and minimise government intervention, thus bringing to the fore the dualism between individual fulfilment and collective progress. In this sense, the ethics of self-help, preached by Samuel Smiles, which also gave way to the ideal of the ‘self-made man’ as the epitome of individualism, inevitably contemplated self-sufficiency as an eminently social duty.¹¹ The individuation process that the characters illustrate in Bulwer-Lytton’s and Poe’s respective fictions, *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd,” is also suggestive of the apparent opposition between collectivity and individualism that prevailed in the philosophical ideas at the time, and is enacted through the character’s positioning as individuals before the collectivity, as embodied by social and family groups, as well as their positioning as individuals in the urban environment, as will be shown in the following section.

Crime in the city: the figure of the flâneur and the ‘unequal gaze’ of the panopticon

Following their recent marriages and their professional engagements, during the decade of the 1830s, both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe went to live in large cities in their respective nations, where they settled down and started a new stage in their lives. Their stay in metropolises such as London and New York exerted a deep influence on both authors at the time and conditioned their process of individuation in the course of their aging, thus gaining deeper awareness of themselves as individuals in front of a collectivity. Likewise, it was at this period, when they were both living in large cities, that they gave rise to their first crime fictions, as indicative of the social conflicts they perceived, but also as suggestive of the personal conflicts that they were facing at this stage of their lives.

Soon after his marriage to Virginia Clemm, Poe and his own family moved back to Richmond, finding the city much unchanged since the author had left it when he was seventeen years of age, and scarcely a year later, in 1837, they moved to New York for fifteen months in the hope that Poe would find better opportunities within the editing

¹¹ Samuel Smiles. *Self-Help, with Illustrations of Character and Conduct*. (Peter W. Sinnema. Ed. Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2002).

world. According to biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn, despite clinging to some hope of employment on the *New York Review* and the publishing his only novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Poe's experience in New York was rather disappointing and hardly prolific in terms of literary output.¹² As a result, in 1838 the Poes left the American metropolis for another publishing centre at the time, the city of Philadelphia, where Poe had hopeful prospects, as the first tale that he ever published had come to light in the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*,¹³ and he had also established connections with the Philadelphia Carey and Lea publishing house, which would eventually lead to the publication of his first collection of prose – *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) – under the recommendation of his friend John Pendleton Kennedy.¹⁴

Hence, in the short span of three years, Poe lived in three different large cities, and somehow emulating the narrator in his tale “The Man of the Crowd,” it could be argued that Poe metaphorically adopted the role of a *flâneur* or observer, as he roamed along the streets of metropolises, looking for prospects of employment, moving from familiar environments to unknown urban settings, where his isolation as an individual in respect of the crowd became significantly more obvious. In this respect, Poe's urban experience at the time endowed his fiction with a remarkable modern quality, to the extent that critic Kevin Hayes goes as far as to qualify Poe as the “one-man modernist,”¹⁵ inasmuch as he anticipated modern art and embodied the figure of the individual in the urban background. The narrator of his tale “The Man of the Crowd” becomes an archetype of the urban and modern experience, inasmuch as he strolls along the streets pursuing an old man that he associates with crime, and in close resemblance with the narrator of his tale, Poe's own knowledge of large cities at this stage of his life

¹² Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 267.

¹³ “Metzengerstein: A Tale in Imitation of the German” was Poe's first tale to appear in print, and it was published on 14th January 1832.

¹⁴ John Pendleton Kennedy (1795-1870) was a Baltimore lawyer, as well as Poe's friend and literary patron. As Dawn Sova points out, John Pendleton Kennedy was a member of the committee that judged Poe's story “MS. Found in a Bottle,” which was ultimately considered the best prose tale in a contest sponsored by the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* in 1833.

¹⁵ Kevin J. Hayes. “One-Man Modernist.” (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 225.

also turned him into an urban explorer. In this respect, Poe exemplified the figure of the *flâneur* as described by his disciple, the French writer Charles Baudelaire:

For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.¹⁶

Hence, according to Baudelaire, the *flâneur* plays a key role in portraying the city and participating in it, thus taking the stance of simultaneously being part of the crowd and standing apart from it. In this sense, the *flâneur* is in possession of his individuality as he ultimately personifies the ‘artist-poet’ of the modern metropolis. However, even if he appears to be a cynical and disengaged voyeur, he is also the man of the people who enters into the life of his subjects, thus ultimately displaying a critical attitude towards the uniformity, but also showing fascination with street life. This double personality that characterises the urban onlooker also portrays the narrator in Poe’s tale “The Man of the Crowd,” insofar as, from his quiet seat in a coffee shop, he looks through the windowpane and sees the man of the crowd, which ultimately precipitates that he makes his way into the street to follow him, thus recounting:

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age,) – a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression.¹⁷

As they metaphorically reflect each other in the windowpane, the *flâneur* metaphorically blends his identity with that of the man of the crowd, thus becoming the figure of ‘the observer’ and that of ‘the observed’ at the same time. The blurring lines

¹⁶ Charles Baudelaire. *The Painter of Modern Life, and Other Essays*. (Jonathan Mayne. Ed. London: Phaidon Press, 1995): 9.

¹⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Man of the Crowd.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 511.

separating the narrator – as the *flâneur* – from the man of the crowd – as a representative subject of the mob – bring to the fore Poe’s reflections on the fuzzy dichotomy that he perceived between the figure of the individual and the sense of belonging to a group, and from a more personal perspective, the increasing schism he identified between himself and any sort of collectivity. In this respect, Poe’s increasing feeling of estrangement bears close resemblance with the ideas of modernity that Georg Simmel presents in his seminal essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), as he claims that “the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces.”¹⁸ Accordingly, the narrator in Poe’s tale feels attracted and repelled on equal terms by the man of the crowd, as, in his old age, he personifies the endurance and eternal quality of the city itself, as well as the social forces that come along with it and gradually engulf the narrator as an individual. Following the mirror effect established through the reflection of the narrator on the glass and his first perception of the man of the crowd, it can be claimed that, through the thread of his ponderings, the narrator symbolically envisions himself as the man of the crowd, as the latter represents the man that the narrator – and by extension, Poe himself – foretells that he will ultimately turn into, that is, an older man at the other side of the social spectrum. In this respect, Poe’s tale “The Man of the Crowd” reflects Poe’s own fears about the urban experience and the alienating effect it would have on his persona at this stage of his life. Hence, the narrator in Poe’s tale mostly complies with Walter Benjamin’s more exclusive description of the figure of the *flâneur*, inasmuch as he considers him an investigator of the city, as well as an indicative sign of the alienation of the city and of the capitalism it represents.¹⁹

Pacing along the streets of large cities such as New York and Philadelphia, Poe might have felt estranged in the midst of an unfamiliar environment, while his contact with its citizens and the crowd populating the streets mostly contributed to increasing

¹⁸ Georg Simmel. “The Metropolis and Mental Life.” (Kurt Wolff. Ed. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press, 1950): 409.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. [Trans. Quintin Hoare and Harry Zohn] (London: Verso 1983): 54.

his feelings of isolation and detachment. And yet, in his previous visit to the city of Richmond, where he had spent most of his youth, Poe might have also felt that memories of a happier past sprang to mind upon his return. Something similar must have happened to Bulwer-Lytton when, a few years after his marriage to Rosina Wheeler, he went back to live in the City of London, where he had been born and had spent the first years of his life. In fact, after living in Woodcot House, near Reading, for two years, Bulwer-Lytton and his wife moved to London in 1830 to live in their residence in Hertford Street, soon after the birth to their first child, Emily. The change of residence altered their habits ostensibly, as they had grown used to living in an isolated country house, whereas once they decided to settle in London, mainly to suit Rosina's whims, they began to socialise lavishly.²⁰ Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton's duty to entertain literary guests and political acquaintances so as to fulfil the social requirements apportioned to a man of his position only contributed to increasing his longing for a state of seclusion in order to give vent to his literary creativity.

Hence, during their stay in large cities, both authors felt a mixture of familiarity and estrangement, which would underline their difference and individuality in relation to society. As a result of their living in a great metropolis, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe entered a crucial period that would not only deeply affect their creativity as literary men, but also the kind of fiction they would write at the time. The texts that they produced at this stage of creativity – *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd” – reflect the complex interaction of individuals with the multitude, which is often brought to the fore through a crime that disrupts the relationship between individuals and the collectivity to which they apparently seem to belong. According to critic Thomas Joswick, “The Man of the Crowd” can be categorised as Poe's earliest tale of crime,²¹ while Dawn Sova also places emphasis on the relevance that crime acquires in Poe's tale as she describes it as “a tale of conscience, featuring a stranger who seems doomed

²⁰ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury, UK: Shire, 1973): 15.

²¹ Thomas Joswick. “Moods of Mind: The Tales of Detection, Crime, and Punishment.” (Eric W. Carlson. Ed. *A Companion to Poe Studies*. London: Greenwood Press, 1996): 237.

to wander forever to make up for some unnamed crime.”²² In this sense, in both literary works the urban environment is endowed with connotations of crime and of the darkest aspects of the human condition. Accordingly, it is of special significance to notice that it was at this particular stage, when living in a large city, that both authors started writing crime fiction as indicative of the clash between the individual and social collectiveness, and as evidence of the rebellion on behalf of the individual, which, once resolved, evinces his stance in front of the collectivity.

As Sibylla Jane Flower notices, while living in London at this stage of his life, Bulwer-Lytton first entered the House of Commons as member for St. Ives,²³ thus beginning his political career, which would extend until he was well advanced in years. As a lawyer and active member in Parliament, Bulwer-Lytton had a deep knowledge of the penal legislation that prevailed at the time, as well as of its intricacies and problematic aspects. Even if in his role as a legislator, he had to ensure the safeguarding of the law, in his role as a man of letters, he could freely give voice to those facets of the criminal legislation that he perceived were unjust and had to be reformed. In this respect, as James Campbell argues, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Paul Clifford* should be hailed as the first important exponent ever published of the emerging genre of Newgate fiction.²⁴ According to Keith Hollingsworth, ‘Newgate’ novels²⁵ owed their growing popularity in the 1830s to their engagement with the condition of English criminal law and with the movement towards its reform that was taking place at the time.²⁶ During the early and mid-decades of the nineteenth-century, the administration of criminal law was constantly discussed, and novels addressing the contemporary legal situation were often considered propaganda for legal reform. In this context, Sibylla Jane Flower

²² Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 147.

²³ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury, UK: Shire, 1973): 15.

²⁴ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 38.

²⁵ Newgate fiction drew its name from the actual Newgate Prison, located at the corner of Newgate Street and Old Bailey, inside the city of London. The prison was originally situated at the site of Newgate; a gate in the Roman London Wall, and it was extended and rebuilt many times, remaining in use for over 700 years, from 1188 to 1902.

²⁶ Keith Hollingsworth. *The Newgate Novel 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens and Thackeray*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963): 19.

claims that the novel *Paul Clifford* was the first of Bulwer-Lytton's reforming literary works that addressed the inequities of the penal code and of the prison system and that would eventually give way to the Reform Act of 1832, which swept away most of the perceived instances of unfair legislation existing in the English penal system.²⁷ Likewise, James Campbell argues that Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* was deeply indebted to the philosopher William Godwin's ideas,²⁸ especially as presented in his novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), whereby Godwin aimed to show how legal institutions can contribute to destroying individuals when they are touched by the justice systems in spite of being innocent of any crime.²⁹ In fact, the severity of the eighteenth-century law could be detected in the fact that the death penalty could be inflicted for burglary, robbery, or arson, among other crimes, and likewise, transportation for more than seven years could ensue owing to something less than an apparently petty felony. Consequently, in the nineteenth-century, Samuel Romilly and James Mackintosh – leaders of the legal reform group – pressed for the repeal of some capital statutes, even though it would not be until Lord Grey, who led a new government devoted to reform, that some indiscriminate death penalties were finally removed, and a significant bulk of the criminal law that had prevailed up to then was revised profusely.

In this context of legal reform, well aware of his responsibility as a politician but also as a writer, in the preface to the 1840 edition of *Paul Clifford*, Bulwer-Lytton claimed that he had written this novel with a twofold object in mind, which was first to draw attention to two errors in contemporary penal institutions, such as “a vicious Prison-discipline and a sanguinary Criminal Code, [and second, to prove that] there is nothing essentially different between vulgar vice and fashionable vice.”³⁰ The novel was thus explicitly designed to question the effectiveness of the punitive methods aimed to

²⁷ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury, UK: Shire, 1973): 15.

²⁸ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 13.

²⁹ William Godwin (1756-1836) was an English journalist, political philosopher and novelist, and he was also considered one of the first exponents of Utilitarianism. William Godwin wrote his novel *Things as They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) to spread the moral and philosophical ideas that he had argued in his treatise *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), whereby he claimed that the links between politics and morality had been severed.

³⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Preface to the 1840 edition.” *Paul Clifford*. (New York: International Book, 1848): v.

redress the criminal as well as the assumed perception that crime and vice were mainly associated with the less privileged classes. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* also brings to the fore the active role that society plays in shaping the criminal, thus hinting that any individual can ultimately be turned into a criminal, precisely by the same legal system intended to prevent and punish crime. In this respect, as Heather Worthington claims, Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* illustrates Michel Foucault's premise that it is not crime that alienates an individual from society, but it is rather crime itself that arises because the individual feels alien in society.³¹ Hence, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* is ultimately rooted in the belief that the law can be turned into an instrument of class control if used by the ruling classes for their own enrichment and the further deprivation of the underprivileged, instead of becoming a means to contribute to the improvement of society and the preclusion of inequalities.

In this respect, Michel Foucault's concept of the 'panopticon' becomes an apt metaphor to draw attention to the concept of the 'unequal gaze' and, by extension, the imbalanced power that could be identified between the penal institutions and the individuals subjected to them.³² According to Foucault, the panopticon was a modern disciplinary institution characterised by 'an unequal gaze,' inasmuch as it offered a constant possibility of observation on behalf of the penal institution, while the prisoner could never be sure whether he was being observed. In this respect, Michel Foucault took the penal institution of the panopticon as indicative of the unequal power that could be identified between the criminal institutions and the individuals subjected to them. Hence, as Bulwer-Lytton notices in the preface to his novel, *Paul Clifford* denounces the unfairness of some aspects in the penal legislation at the time, but also places a significant emphasis on the social prejudices that can turn an individual into a criminal

³¹ Heather Worthington. "Against the Law: Bulwer's Fictions of Crime." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton*. Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing, 2004): 59.

³² In his seminal volume *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), the philosopher Michel Foucault analyses the changes that occurred in Western penal systems during the modern age. The penal institution of the panopticon was created by Jeremy Bentham, who is considered the founder of Utilitarianism, which preached that the best moral action is the one that maximises utility. One of Foucault's most important contributions was the introduction of the panopticon as a metaphor.

only on account of his social class. In this sense, the main character in *Paul Clifford* exemplifies the author's aim to write this novel, inasmuch as Paul turns into a criminal as a result of the injustice of the penal legislation, as he is wrongly accused of a crime that he has not committed, and consequently, he is imprisoned unjustly. Furthermore, though, when he joins a gang of thieves to show his repulsion for the legal institutions,³³ and is ultimately captured and about to be sentenced to death, not only is it revealed that Paul is of noble birth,³⁴ but also that he is the son of William Brandon, the judge who is trying him in court. As a thief whose criminal actions are ultimately aimed at exposing the injustice of the legal system, as well as an outlaw that actually belongs to the privileged classes, Paul conforms to the role of the 'noble bandit,' to use Eric Hobsbawm's words, inasmuch as he is a fugitive who resorts to crime as a result of injustice,³⁵ and makes use of his personal case to denounce injustices within the penal system.

Even though, on a social level, Bulwer-Lytton's first incursion into crime fiction gave voice to the need to reform the current English criminal law, on an individual level, it can also be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* is also symptomatic of the personal conflicts that the author was compelled to bear at the time. In this respect, it was at this stage that Bulwer-Lytton gained insight into the contradictions of his life, thus becoming aware of a sort of 'double side' emerging as a result of the conflict between his personal and social circumstances. Having remained an obedient son for most of his childhood and youth, for the first time he found himself contradicting and disappointing his mother, Elizabeth Barbara, through his final decision to marry Rosina Wheeler against his mother's wishes. Likewise, despite the fact that he came from noble origins and he would eventually become a baronet, having

³³ Taking into consideration the hero's ultimate vindictive vein, Bulwer-Lytton's hero Paul Clifford bears some resemblance to Robin Hood, the heroic outlaw in English folklore, especially as portrayed in Walter Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* (1820).

³⁴ According to Leslie Mitchell, this twist in the plot of the novel *Paul Clifford* shows the important influence that Friedrich Schiller exerted on Bulwer-Lytton, since, in Schiller's play *Die Räuber* (1781), once rejected by his father, the character of Karl Moor becomes a criminal in order to fight against the unfairness of the feudal authorities in spite of his noble origins. See Leslie Mitchell's *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 162.

³⁵ Eric Hobsbawm. *Bandits*. (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1969).

been threatened with disinheritance, Bulwer-Lytton felt under the obligation to write prolifically in order to earn a living and live up to his wife's social expectations. Hence, Bulwer-Lytton gained insight into the arbitrariness of belonging to a determinate social faction, and by portraying a bandit of noble origins in his novel *Paul Clifford*, he was ultimately projecting an alternative existence, had he been born in a different social environment and under different social circumstances. As happens to the hero of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, the pervasive and engulfing influence that social affiliation can exert on the individual obliged the author to lead, even if metaphorically, a sort of 'double existence' – that is, trying to please the people around him, while striving to fulfil his own wishes – while he also gained awareness of the increasing gap separating his public and private life.

The use of the metaphors presented above involving the figure of the *flâneur* in Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd" and the institution of the 'panopticon' in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* entails that both crime fictions portray the evident clash between the individual and society, even if in a different way. Although the *flâneur* is eminently an observer, he ultimately merges with the crowd, thus blurring the identity boundaries between the individual and the group, in analogy with the narrator in Poe's tale, who joins the mob in the street, even if he also retains his individuality, thus becoming part of the mob while, at the same time, standing apart from it. Likewise, the narrator and the man of the crowd become doubles of one another inasmuch as they reflect each other in the glass and the narrator eventually finds himself emulating the movements of the man of the crowd. In contrast, the gulf established between the individual and society in Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* rather places emphasis on the 'unequal gaze' of the 'panopticon,' insofar as Paul's social connection – for better or worse – conditions his whole existence in a highly hierarchical society, obliging him to use a different name in his private and public life as indicative of his conflicting identity, while he escapes and lives abroad in order to make a name for himself in a different country, thus leaving behind his former social identity. Accordingly, as an individual, Paul feels pressurised by the social collectiveness in a highly-stratified society, somehow echoing Bulwer-Lytton's profound awareness of his social position,

which led him to feel more obliged to conform to the social requisites pertaining to his social faction.

The metaphor of theft: stealing time from the aged

In the early crime fiction of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe – of which *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd” are clear exponents – theft becomes a metaphor that underscores significant biographical events in the lives of both authors. As a case in point, the crime of which the main character in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Paul, is unjustly accused foretells important aspects about his origins and the identity of his father, and, by extension, this passage also reveals biographical aspects that shed light on the kind of relationship that Bulwer-Lytton had with father figures, such as his father and grandfather. In Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Paul is an orphan raised by Margery Lobkins who leads a humble life surrounded by individuals that often indulge in crime, but nonetheless, behave honourably to their friends and comrades. Hence, living amidst a gang of thieves but with a heart of gold, Paul sometimes accompanies his friend Long Ned on his criminal errands in London, when, on one occasion, the latter decides to assault an aged man and his niece as they are leaving the theatre. Even though Long Ned manages to steal the wealthy man’s watch and escape from the scene, Paul is ultimately apprehended, wrongfully accused of the theft, and sentenced to prison.³⁶ In an unexpected twist of the plot, the victim of the theft that Long Ned perpetrates happens to be a member of the upper classes, Judge William Brandon, who is in fact very closely related to Paul, as he is not only the uncle of Paul’s wife to be, Lucy Brandon, but, as is later on revealed in an example of *anagnorisis* – of disclosure of one’s identity in Aristotle’s *Poetics* – he is also the father who will eventually discover in Paul the lost son that he has spent nearly a lifetime searching for. In the novel, this example of *peripeteia* – of the reversal of the circumstances in the plot – is described in the following way, as Paul gains insight into the fact that he is going to be charged with a crime – that of theft – that he has not committed:

³⁶ This twist in the plot is reminiscent of the main character in Charles Dickens’ eponymous novel, *Oliver Twist* (1838), since Oliver, like Paul in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Paul Clifford* (1830), is also falsely arrested and charged as a pickpocket.

Paul found himself suddenly marched off between two tall fellows, who looked prodigiously inclined to eat him. By this time he had recovered his surprise and dismay: he did not want the penetration to see that his companion had really committed the offence for which *he* was charged; and he also foresaw that the circumstance might be attended with disagreeable consequences to himself.³⁷

Through the final revelation of Paul's actual identity, the fact of 'stealing the watch' from his actual father gains a symbolic meaning, as it metaphorically implies 'stealing time' from him. Both Paul and Judge Brandon are totally unaware of the close bond that ties them, and yet, the fact that Paul ends up being accused of robbing his father of his watch ultimately anticipates Paul's punishment for claiming to be the recipient of William Brandon's property, thus reprimanding him for an act of anticipatory inheritance while his father is still alive. Even if unaware of this at the time, Paul would be claiming what belongs to him by birthright, and thus, what appears to be a stolen watch might in fact be his heirloom, given the fact that Paul is the actual beneficiary of William Brandon's legacy.

Drawing on biographical issues, this episode in the novel *Paul Clifford* becomes particularly evocative of Bulwer-Lytton's memories of the estrangement that had characterised his relationship with his father, which the author particularly appeared to resent at this stage of his life. In his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton stated that his father always remained distant, even believing that his father might have felt some sort of aversion towards him during his childhood, and noticing that his mother's affection and doting on him might have partly accounted for his father's jealousy and covetous nature.³⁸ In fact, what mostly seemed to intensify General Bulwer's hatred for Bulwer-Lytton was his wife's decision to select him, being their youngest son, as her heir and representative. In his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton admitted that his father considered this event particularly offensive as, being an eldest son himself, he venerated the laws of

³⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Paul Clifford*. (New York: International Book, 1848): 63-64.

³⁸ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I*. (London: Kegan Paul, 1883).

primogeniture.³⁹ The fact that Bulwer-Lytton, being the youngest of three brothers, had been proclaimed heir of his mother's property before General Bulwer's demise seemed to call into question the General's authority, as Bulwer-Lytton took precedence over his own father in the Lytton family lineage, and thus, anticipated the time when his proclamation as heir was due to take place. Likewise, this event soon acquired prophetic connotations as General Bulwer would die only a few years later, when Bulwer-Lytton had scarcely turned four years of age.

By being proclaimed successor before due time, even if unwillingly, Bulwer-Lytton was somehow blamed for having set the clock forward, just like Paul is accused of stealing his father's watch, thus prematurely claiming ownership over the goods that one day, as legitimate heir, would be his own. Therefore, metaphorically speaking, he is actually recriminated for appropriating, before due course, what will be his own, thereby disregarding the fact that his father is still alive and entitled to his property. Accordingly, in a way, Paul is scolded for anticipating his father's death, thus subverting his paternal authority as well as the dictates of time, even if Paul's accusation of theft ultimately responds to a mistaken perception, due to the fact that he was not the actual perpetrator of the crime, and also because the token that he is accused of stealing was actually destined to become his own in the future.

If Bulwer-Lytton resented his father's dislike of him for being proclaimed heir before due time – disregarding the fact that his father was still alive, and thus, appropriating what could still not be considered his legal possessions – Poe also had to bear serious accusations of robbing his foster father, John Allan, of some expensive items. According to Kenneth Silverman, when in 1829 Poe went back to Richmond to attend the funeral of his foster mother, Frances Allan, he was accused of stealing silver spoons and table linens from his paternal house, Moldavia.⁴⁰ Even if it was never confirmed or acknowledged, his dissolute conduct at the time might have responded, for the most part, to frustration and rage, and yet, it could also be interpreted as an act of

³⁹ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883).

⁴⁰ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance.* (New York: Harper, 1991): 126.

revenge towards John Allan, and it is in this sense that Poe's transgression would acquire a significant symbolism in the light of what was going to happen subsequently. Poe had grown accustomed to a certain standard of living, having been raised in a wealthy family of the American South and having been educated in Great Britain. Hence, even if he had never been legally adopted, he behaved like a member of the Allan family, and secretly aspired to be accepted and considered as such, thus nourishing hopes of being socially promoted. Nonetheless, in spite of contemplating the possibility of being proclaimed John Allan's heir eventually, he gradually became aware that this aspiration was seriously threatened as a result of a series of circumstances. In fact, John Allan married again scarcely one year after Frances Allan's demise, and had legitimate successors with his second wife, Louisa Gabriella Patterson. Consequently, after spending most of his life up to then in the Allan household, Poe realised he would soon be deprived of what he claimed to be his right. When he discovered that his aspirations to a certain standard of living began to fall apart, he necessarily felt deprived of the kind of life he had projected, and became totally estranged from a family that he had considered his own. Accordingly, the symbolic act of stealing valuables from John Allan's household at the time ultimately evinces Poe's attempt at recovering what he rightfully deemed to be of his own property. Taking possession of some costly items, such as silver spoons and table linens, also symbolised Poe's aspiration to hold on to an exclusive social set that he had been acquainted with in his youth. In his personal view, the fact of appropriating some valuables from what he considered to be his house could not possibly be regarded as theft, as he was merely laying claim to what he believed to be his own by right.

Poe's trouble-strewn transition from a privileged to a precarious social condition was tackled in his fiction at the time. In this respect, the gradual fall of the individual from the social ladder along with the decline of his social aspirations are explored in the tale "The Man of the Crowd," as Poe's earliest story of crime. In an early passage of "The Man of the Crowd," the narrator appears sitting in a London coffee shop, with a cigar in his mouth and a newspaper on his lap. He occupies a privileged position in the coffee shop that provides him with a perfect view of all the social strata, as he observes

representatives of the different social classes rambling along the streets of London. The narrator's idleness stands in sharp contrast with the frantic activity of the crowd outside, thus showing how he remains comfortably detached from the social mass and enjoys his leisure time. Nonetheless, as a result of the powerful attraction that an eccentric old man begins to exert over him, the narrator feels the urge to leave the coffee shop, follow the man of the crowd along the streets, and abandon his privileged position to merge with the mass. In this respect, the narrator explains that

Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view – to know more of him. Hurriedly putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street, and pushed through the crowd in the direction which I had seen him take; for he had already disappeared.⁴¹

The transitional move that the quotation above portrays is highly evocative of the situation that Poe was facing at the time, as he felt trapped between his former privileged condition with the Allans and the foreseeable bleak future that was awaiting him. From the warm and quiet atmosphere inside the coffee shop, the narrator moves into the cold and noisy streets of London, where his isolation as an individual is even further stressed amid the crowd. Likewise, the items that the narrator holds in his hands are highly symbolic of Poe's own gradual transformation from privilege to ultimate social stigmatisation, since, although the narrator is depicted as holding a cigar and reading a newspaper, thus underlining the narrator's idleness as well as his privileged position, they also imply that this comfortable situation is necessarily transient and ephemeral, since these elements are necessarily perishable by default. Likewise, drawing on biographical issues, the fact that the narrator of the story is firstly presented smoking a cigar becomes particularly evocative of Poe's bond with his foster father, since John Allan was a successful tobacco merchant, and therefore, ratifies his connection with the Allans. These initial scenes in the tale are thus reminiscent of Poe's comfortable but temporary situation preceding his separation from the Allans, since, just as the narrator is gradually drawn to the street and is haunted by the presence of the man

⁴¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Man of the Crowd." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 511.

of the crowd, Poe was deprived of this advantaged condition after a youth of privilege and comfort.

Conversely, the narrator perceives the man of the crowd pacing along the streets of London as the embodiment of crime and takes for granted that this old man is guilty, although this accusation is never truly proven and is merely based on the narrator's presumptions, as he regards the old man's act of hiding amongst the multitude as sheer evidence of his crime. In this respect, Poe's tale draws attention to the fact that the narrator makes a judgement on the man of the crowd as merely based on his impressions. Likewise, the narrator himself even casts doubt on his own appreciation, as, upon identifying the tokens that he believes the man of the crowd has subtracted, he significantly reveals that –

I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and my vision deceived me, or, through a rent in a closely-buttoned and evidently second-handed *roquelaire* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger.⁴²

The narrator's acknowledged doubts about having identified a diamond and a dagger in the old man's possession ultimately involves that the line dividing social acceptance from social stigmatisation mostly responds to personal – and even defective – perception. In spite of his strong prejudice against the man of the crowd, the narrator often finds himself emulating the moves of the man that he ultimately describes as “the type and the genius of deep crime.”⁴³ In this respect, the boundaries separating the observer from the actual subject of his scrutiny often become blurred, especially since the man of the crowd first comes into view when the narrator is looking through the glass of the window pane in the coffee shop. The fact that, in this scene of the story, the narrator seems unable to discern whether he is looking at a man outside or at his own reflection in the glass, has led critics such as Patrick Quinn to identify the old man in

⁴² Edgar Allan Poe. “The Man of the Crowd.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 512.

⁴³ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Man of the Crowd.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 515.

Poe's story as the narrator's double.⁴⁴ Likewise, Charles May corroborates this interpretation contending that "the narrator sees the secret side of himself – his perverse shadow – in the old man."⁴⁵ Following these readings and drawing on a biographical interpretation of the tale, it can be argued that both the narrator and the man of the crowd represent two sides of the same spectrum in Poe's stage of life at the time. The old man thus ultimately foretells the narrator's future situation, as the latter contemplates the former through the mirror effect in a window pane. The transition from an advantaged to a precarious position – marking the farewell to a youth of splendour and the bleak prospects of his old age – underlines Poe's situation at the time, well aware of the blurring limits separating social acceptance from social ostracism as he had to renounce his hopes of becoming a member of the Allan household. Likewise, in opposition to the haunting sense of dissolution attached to the narrator through the symbolic tokens of a cigar and a newspaper, the old man covetously keeps in his possession a dagger and a diamond, which even though they may stand as concrete evidence of his misdeed, they are also imperishable items that denote permanence and endurance. Drawing on the interpretation of Poe's tale as the old man being the prospective double figure of the narrator, Poe was fictionalising the painful transitional situation he was undergoing, when he was detached from the Allans and ended up being accused of theft, as Poe's concern about ensuring his permanence in his privileged situation compelled him to claim what he considered to be his own before due time, which ultimately led him to be perceived as indulging in criminal behaviour.

If "The Man of the Crowd" echoes Poe's social transition from a privileged to a precarious situation and even the theft of some of John Allan's valuables to assert his right as legitimate inheritor, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, Paul's accusation of stealing Judge Brandon's watch brings to mind Bulwer-Lytton's biographical episode of being designated heir even if his father, General William Bulwer, was still alive, thus laying claim over his inheritance before time. In addition, though, Bulwer-Lytton also experienced another important episode of unlawful usurpation during his childhood that

⁴⁴ Thomas Joswick. "Moods of Mind: The Tales of Detection, Crime, and Punishment." (Eric W. Carlson. Ed. *A Companion to Poe Studies*. London: Greenwood Press, 1996): 238.

⁴⁵ Charles May. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1991): 100.

would remain in his memory for years to come, and that is also echoed in his novel *Paul Clifford*. Aware of its significance, in his autobiography Bulwer-Lytton referred to this event as his first temptation in life, which took place when he was six years old and his father, General William Bulwer, had already passed away.⁴⁶ Bulwer-Lytton's maternal grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton, was regarded as a great scholar and Bulwer-Lytton, sharing his fondness for books, would eventually perceive him as a model to imitate that would make up for the premature loss of his father. However, the old scholar always remained distant from his grandson to the extent that Bulwer-Lytton would mostly remember his grandfather for his harsh discipline and sternness. On one occasion, during the course of the visit of a midshipman who came to dine with Richard Warburton Lytton, Bulwer-Lytton's attention was drawn towards a cutlass – a type of sword – that the midshipman was carrying, and it was even many years later that Bulwer-Lytton would recall seizing the weapon and running away with it, even if he could not assert whether he had any real intention of stealing it. As a child, Bulwer-Lytton managed to hide the weapon and retain it as his own possession, indulging in daydreaming with this cutlass for long hours and, even if the cutlass was apparently made of gold and pearls, Bulwer-Lytton did not praise it for its economic value, but because he mostly regarded it as a weapon by means of which he could attempt to emulate his late father, General William Bulwer, as an honourable member of the army. Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton's first indulgence in temptation met a tragic end, since, when his grandfather discovered his felony, he intended to inflict harsh punishment on his grandson, and when Bulwer-Lytton lay down sleeping, his grandfather exchanged the cutlass, which the child had placed by his side, for a birch, thus exchanging the weapon of the offence for the weapon of punishment. Bulwer-Lytton's recollections of the transformation of the purloined cutlass into his grandfather's birch – the punishment awaiting his crime – became so powerful that they would remain in his memory until adulthood.

⁴⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883).

Although, by stealing the cutlass of his grandfather's guest, Bulwer-Lytton was ultimately displaying his right to emulate his late father, his misdeed managed to defy his grandfather's authority and upset him in a significant way. In fact, for Bulwer-Lytton, the incident would prove prophetic, since, as a result of his transgression, his grandfather would confess to his daughter, Elizabeth Barbara, that his prediction of his grandson's character as wicked had just been confirmed, thus condemning him to be regarded as such because of his misbehaviour as a child. Hence, Richard Warburton Lytton had predicted his grandson's temperament, and having his expectations confirmed through one single event, he mostly passed judgement on Bulwer-Lytton on the grounds of his intuition, which would always condition his opinion about his grandson. Early in life, Bulwer-Lytton thus gained insight into how social prejudice can exert an important influence on the individual to the extent of conditioning one's behaviour so as to unconsciously meet those expectations. In fact, in his novel *Paul Clifford*, it is as the result of having been wrongly accused of stealing Judge Brandon's watch that Paul decides to break with society and join a gang of thieves under a new identity. In fact, it is only after having escaped from prison with his friend Augustus Tomlinson that Paul indulges in criminal behaviour for the first time in order to eat, as the following scene portrays:

At that time 'the bowels' of Augustus Tomlinson began to remind him of their demands; and he accordingly suggested the *desirability* of their seizing the first peasant they encountered, and causing him to exchange clothes with one of the fugitives, who would thus be enabled to enter a public-house and provide for their mutual necessities. Paul agreed to this proposition, and, accordingly, they watched their opportunity and *caught* a ploughman. Augustus stripped him of his frock, hat, and worsted stockings; and Paul, hardened by necessity and companionship, helped to tie the poor ploughman to a tree.⁴⁷

Having been wrongly accused of being a thief, Paul eventually meets the social expectations that had passed judgment on him unfairly, and he actually turns into the criminal that he had been expected to become.

⁴⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Paul Clifford*. (New York: International Book, 1848): 94.

The crime of theft underscores important aspects regarding identity issues in both Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd" and Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, inasmuch as it becomes a rite of initiation into the criminal world that underlines the blurring boundaries separating social respectability from ostracism, but also sheds light on how Paul in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and the man of the crowd in Poe's tale are ultimately judged by social expectations, prejudices, and even erroneous perceptions. In both cases, the personal events in the lives of the authors that ultimately gave rise to their respective fictions – being accused of theft themselves – underscore the blurred line separating the action of laying claim to one's right and the wrongful perception that others may have of that action. Bulwer-Lytton's 'theft' of the cutlass to emulate his father and Poe's 'theft' of linens and silver spoons from the Allan household ultimately acquire a symbolic quality, inasmuch as their actions involved laying claim to what they perceived as their own, even though they were perceived as highly incriminating, or at best, subjected to reprobation.

Family matters: the importance attached to a name

At this stage of their lives, both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe underwent a gradual detachment from their family, which could be interpreted as indicative of feeling ostracised and apart from their relatives, but also as symptomatic of envisioning themselves as progressively autonomous and independent as individuals. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton grew gradually apart from his mother, especially following his marriage to Rosina Wheeler. Having been brought up and educated at home, Bulwer-Lytton had developed a close and affectionate relationship with his mother, particularly as his father, General Bulwer, had died when Bulwer-Lytton was only a child. Elizabeth Barbara's opposition to her son's marriage, together with her intention to suspend her son's allowance, placed Bulwer-Lytton in an awkward position, not only economically but also personally, as he felt compelled to write in order to earn a living, but, for the first time in his life, he also felt emotionally detached from his mother. Likewise, even if Poe had never been on good terms with his foster father, John Allan, their relationship worsened upon Frances Allan's demise and John Allan's subsequent marriage to his

second wife, Louisa Gabriella Patterson. Poe had always expected to become John Allan's heir, but since this connection was never legally sanctioned and his name was not included in his foster father's will, Poe's hopes of overtly belonging to the Allan family, together with his alluring economic prospects, were soon shattered and his former bond to the Allan family ultimately remained an issue of the past.

The gradual detachment from their respective parents exerted a deep influence on both writers, and necessarily involved a metaphorical rite of passage that marked their entry upon a different stage in their lives. In both cases, even if to a different extent, the kind of life that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe had projected and envisioned for themselves during the early years of their adult lives began to appear unfeasible at this stage, and their former expectations gradually gave way to a more unwelcoming reality. Both writers gained a deeper insight into their gradual isolation, realising that, at this point, they were dependent on their own. Their awareness of their particular situation at the time might have brought about nostalgia for the past and a metaphorical feeling of exposure and vulnerability as individuals in respect of the crowd, which gradually transformed into a sort of rebellious attitude against the surrounding collectivity and a personal need to assert their individuality. As reflective of their personal situations, the fictions that both would write at the time, as is the case with Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* and Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd," thus depict individuals swinging from their association with a community to their gradual detachment and ultimate isolation.

As is the case with the main character in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, the divide separating the individual from the collectivity is perceived through the use of different names which stand for an extension of one's identity as either an outcast or as belonging to a determinate community or social group. In this respect, when Paul feels part of a community, he uses one name that significantly changes when he stands apart from the group or defies the social norms regulating the collectivity. This discrepancy in names, which is notoriously used in renowned Victorian literary works such as Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), was also displayed

earlier on in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, since its protagonist adopts a different name and, therefore, a different personality, according to the role he plays in the course of his adherence or detachment from social collectiveness. In the initial scenes of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, the protagonist's mother dies before she can even give him a name, and even though Margery Lobkins adopts him, he remains deprived of a family name and is merely given a first name, 'Paul,' although, when he is accused of theft, Paul presents himself to the judge as 'Paul Lobkins,' thus showing his family bond with his foster mother. Nonetheless, once he escapes from prison, Paul decides to join a gang of thieves and calls himself 'Captain Lovett,' his name being consequently associated with a notorious highwayman, who is feared all around London. Conversely, though, when Paul gets acquainted with Lucy Brandon, Judge Brandon's niece, and falls in love with her, he decides to adopt another personality under the name of 'Captain Clifford,' whom everybody regards as a man of a high military rank coming from an illustrious family.

Accordingly, by adopting different names such as 'Captain Lovett' and 'Captain Clifford,' Paul perfectly distinguishes the role to play in the different contexts in which he intervenes. As Captain Lovett – the Jungian 'shadow' of the protagonist – Paul leads a riot against society, robbing the privileged classes of their valuables so that the poor can survive. By contrast, as Captain Clifford – the Jungian 'persona' of the protagonist – Paul is highly praised for his good manners and exquisite talent in socialising with aristocrats and the upper classes. Paul becomes Captain Lovett or Captain Clifford depending on the circumstances, thus illustrating the arbitrariness of occupying a higher or a lower position in society. As an individual, Paul shares some of the qualities of both Captain Clifford and Captain Lovett, even if he is well aware that he is neither of them, as he is not an actual criminal and he is not a true member of the privileged classes either. Finding his actual origins and leaving behind his different 'masks,' to use Carl Jung's terminology, as both highwayman and socialite grants him his true identity as an individual emerging from the opposite sides of the social spectrum. In fact, it is Lord Mauleverer, Lucy Brandon's lascivious suitor, who ultimately unveils Paul

Clifford's actual identity, as he hides his darker nature behind a respectable name, thus revealing that Clifford and Lovett are names that refer to the same man:

“But, my dear Brandon, I have strange news for you! You remember that fellow Clifford, who had the insolence to address himself to your adorable niece? I told you I suspected that long friend of his of having made my acquaintance somewhat unpleasantly, and I therefore doubted of Clifford himself. Well, my dear friend, this Clifford is – whom do you think? – no other than Mr Lovett, of Newgate celebrity!”⁴⁸

If Paul adopts a different personality according to the circumstances that he is involved in, it is unveiled that, his biological father, Judge William Brandon, in spite of being a reputed member of the illustrious social classes, also hides his true origins under a different name. In his youth, Brandon bore the name of Welford and lived in a small town, where he got married and had a young child, although they never established any friendship with any of the villagers and always remained detached from the rest. Upon learning that his wife is having an affair with another man and has eloped taking their son with her, Welford decides to start a new life in London under a different name, William Brandon, in the attempt to look for his kidnapped son, whom he would eventually find in Paul – the criminal that he is trying in court and is about to sentence to death for theft. Consequently, both father and son adopt different names that they use in different contexts through their lives until their true identity is finally brought to light, hence they both adopt a different personality in different contexts, thus clearly separating their public from their private life.

Even if the different surnames that Paul adopts are indicative of their affiliation with a determinate social class, his ultimate preference for a self-created name underlines his literal aim to make himself a name, thus asserting his identity as an individual rather than as a member of a collectivity, which ultimately marks his process of growing up as an adult. Hence, even though his close bond to Judge William Brandon is eventually discovered, Paul never adopts his father's family name – ‘Brandon’ – but rather decides to retain his own invented surname, ‘Clifford.’ The fact

⁴⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Paul Clifford*. (New York: International Book, 1848): 328.

that Paul adopts 'Clifford' as his surname, instead of that of his unlawful *alter ego*, Lovett, implies that he intends to hold on to his respectable self, discarding his reprobate personality as Captain Lovett. Nevertheless, 'Clifford,' as well as 'Lovett,' are invented surnames and the result of Paul's own making, hence his decision to call himself with a self-invented name actually involves declaring himself a self-made man and rejecting his affiliation with any determinate kin. In fact, it is under his self-created identity as 'Paul Clifford' that he eventually becomes a prosperous businessman abroad, where he is highly praised as the paradigm of an individual who has forged his own fate and has managed to succeed in his endeavours.

In Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd," both the narrator and the old man he pursues along the streets of London remain nameless, which makes it unfeasible to assert their true origins or validate their adherence to a specific family or social group. Likewise, their lack of name metaphorically connotes an absence of identity and also contributes to stretching further the bond that joins both characters and turn them into double figures of each other. The man of the crowd merges with the rest of people so as to gain anonymity and remain unnoticed, but from the perspective of the narrator, the man of the crowd also stands out in the mob as a single individual. Correspondingly, this sense of belonging and standing apart also befalls the narrator inasmuch as, by means of imitating the moves of the man of the crowd, he necessarily finds himself merging with the multitude while holding on to his subjectivity as the narrative voice of the story. Drawing on a biographical interpretation of the tale, it can be argued that Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" underpins the author's ever-awkward positioning with regard to collectiveness, inasmuch as he was often haunted by a sense of fluctuating alliance as well as detachment with respect to kin and social class. This ever-present feeling of shifting factions was often reflected in the use that Poe would make of his surnames, as indicative of the fluctuating quality that his family connections ultimately acquired. In this sense, Poe's omission or inclusion of his full surnames in his signature became intricate, since – in his condition as an orphan, as well as in his role as a not-legally-accepted member in the Allans' household – he believed that neither 'Poe' nor

‘Allan’ could ultimately afford him the family bond and social status that he had so much coveted.

Accordingly, it can be claimed that both Poe and Bulwer-Lytton were well aware of the significant implications attached to family names. In Poe’s case, upon being adopted by the Allans, he usually combined the surname of his biological family, ‘Poe,’ with that of his foster family, ‘Allan’ – which would always significantly precede his own – to the extent that he would ever become known as ‘Allan Poe.’ Nevertheless, Poe sometimes adopted alternative names or omitted the surname ‘Allan’ at his convenience, thus not only showing his concern about family names, but also his creative vein to literally make a name of his own. As a case in point, according to biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn, before Poe had turned twenty years of age, he returned to the city of his birth, Boston, to enlist in the United States Army as a private soldier under the false name of Edgar A. Perry.⁴⁹ As Hobson Quinn further claims, Poe’s misrepresentation of his name mostly responded to the fact that he intended to disappear and pass unnoticed amid the crowd of soldiers, like the man of the crowd in his story. However, taking into consideration that Poe’s paternal grandfather, General Poe, acquired a notable reputation in the army as General Poe, it is significant to notice that Poe decided not to retain his own family fame. Accordingly, the fact of hiding his real identity under an invented appellation appeared to be aimed at maintaining his anonymity during his stay in the army, so as to avoid any connection with his grandfather, and instead, make a name for himself.

Likewise, well aware that his foster father, John Allan, always disapproved of his poetic aspirations, in his literary endeavours, Poe would usually disguise his attachment to the Allan family. As a case in point, Poe published his first collection of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), under the appellative of ‘a Bostonian,’ and he signed his subsequent collection of poetry, *Poems* (1831), with the name ‘Edgar A. Poe,’ thus omitting his family bond to the Allans repeatedly, and necessarily, intentionally. This tendency would also extend to his private documents, as, for the most

⁴⁹ Arthur Hobson Quinn. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 119.

part, Poe also used to sign his correspondence writing his full name, but only including the initial letter of his foster family name, as 'E.A. Poe' or 'Edgar A. Poe.' Likewise, in his marriage bond to Virginia Clemm, dated 1836, Poe also signed with his full name, but again, he only included the initial letter of his foster family surname. It is significant to notice that, in his early literary endeavours, Poe chose to ensure his anonymity, whereas, as his gradual detachment from the Allans' household became more effective, he began to keep only his biological surname visible, while placing the initial 'A' after his name and before his surname, aware that it could easily be mistaken for a middle name. Hence, Poe's decision to keep his own surname visible instead of that of the Allans ultimately seemed to sanction his blatant estrangement with his foster family.

Nonetheless, Poe's ongoing tendency not to refer to his foster family's surname seemed to come to a halt precisely upon the advent of John Allan's death. As biographer Kenneth Silverman notices, in the first two letters that Poe wrote following John Allan's demise, he unusually signed giving the full surname of the Allan family, thus becoming one of the few times that he did not sign as 'Edgar A. Poe' or 'E.A. Poe,' as so far had been his general habit.⁵⁰ As Silverman further argues, at that time Poe's signature including the surname of his foster family underpinned his hopes of being regarded as John Allan's adopted son and his prospects of being considered his legal heir. Accordingly, Poe made use of his foster family surname to assert his right to become John Allan's inheritor, well aware that his alliance with the Allans would grant him important economic security, and in times of trouble, the comforting feeling of belonging to a prosperous kin. Nonetheless, as time would tell, in literary circles, for the most part he would become widely known by the name of Poe – his own family name – which emphasised his alliance to his own biological family, and especially, to his true origins, thus ultimately making a name of his own and asserting his independence, even if at the cost of growing estranged from his foster family.

If, as an orphan, Poe aspired to become accepted in the Allan family, thus showing this duality by means of his two family surnames, Bulwer-Lytton's family

⁵⁰ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper, 1991): 126.

name, and particularly, its order, also carried a special meaning. When Bulwer-Lytton's mother – whose maiden surname was 'Lytton' – married General Bulwer, she became known as 'Elizabeth Barbara Bulwer.' Nonetheless, when Elizabeth's father died soon after General Bulwer, she became an heiress, retaking the surname Lytton and adopting the name 'Elizabeth Barbara Bulwer Lytton,' thus reincorporating her own family name with that of her late husband. Since she was a widow and an heiress, all her three sons were christened 'Lytton Bulwer,' hence Bulwer-Lytton was baptised as 'Edward Lytton,' and used this surname during his youth, thus adopting his maternal surname. The fact that Bulwer-Lytton remained a 'Lytton,' regardless of his own father's own family name at the time, reinforced his mother's decision to name him as her heir, and by extension, it also emphasised his father's detached presence during the first years of his life. As a matter of fact, during his youth, in his correspondence, Bulwer-Lytton signed himself mostly as 'E. Lytton Bulwer,' thus giving precedence to his mother's surname to the detriment of that of his father.

Nevertheless, when he began to gain popularity as a renowned man of letters, he came to be known as 'Bulwer-Lytton' or simply 'Bulwer,' hence his father's presence, even if silenced for a while, eventually emerged to stay. In contrast, though, when Bulwer-Lytton was raised to a peerage late in his life, he became known as 'Lord Lytton.' Accordingly, as a result of the enormous weight attached to his political life, his surname 'Lytton' gained more popularity, while 'Bulwer' remained his literary name. In this respect, it could be argued that Bulwer-Lytton embodied an apparently perfect blending of two sides – private and public – which were often kept separate, as Bulwer, the novelist, and Lytton, the aristocrat. This tendency appeared to expand to Bulwer-Lytton's son, Robert, who, in his political duties, would become known through his family surname 'Bulwer-Lytton,' in his literary endeavours, he concealed his identity under the pseudonym of 'Owen Meredith,' and as an aristocrat, he was awarded the honorary title of 'Earl of Lytton.'

Accordingly, Bulwer-Lytton was well aware of the importance attached to family names as indicative of personal identity, and appeared to make use of this awareness in order to create the character of Paul Clifford. As a case in point, in

Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Paul's paternal surname – Brandon – brings echoes of 'Bulwer,' while his chosen surname as a socialite – Clifford – is remindful of 'Lytton.' In resemblance with Bulwer-Lytton, who, in his youth, appeared to disregard his paternal surname 'Bulwer' in favour of his maternal surname 'Lytton,' in the novel, Paul also discards his paternal family name 'Brandon,' ultimately bringing his father's family name to extinction. In contrast, 'Clifford' is the surname that Paul uses in his social intercourse with the privileged classes and is also the family name that will be retained for generations to come, in analogy with the Lytton family name, which is endowed with aristocratic connotations and passes on from generation to generation. However, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, even if Paul has gained popularity and esteem under the surname of 'Clifford,' which refers to his public self, it is of special significance to notice that 'Clifford' is ultimately Paul's own creation, as he has forged this name on his own. Likewise, as later revealed, not only is 'Clifford' associated with the surname of a reputed socialite, but it also becomes the family name of a prosperous businessman and self-made man in the colonies, as Paul marries Lucy Brandon and they raise their own family in the United States of America. In this respect, 'Clifford' becomes the perfect blending of a highly-acclaimed personality in the social circles and the figure of a self-made man in the colonies. Paul Clifford personifies Bulwer-Lytton's own amalgamated identity as an aristocrat and as a self-made man, since he began to write in order to make a living under his mother's threat of disinheritance as well as to make a name of his own as a writer, thus asserting his independence as an individual.

Transatlantic expatriates in pursuit of an alternate existence

The individuation process that gradually sets the main characters apart from the collectivity in Poe's tale and Bulwer-Lytton's novel is also further stressed through their ultimate expatriation. In Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd," the action unfolds in the City of London, while, even if Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* is also mostly set in London, its main character, Paul, is expatriated to Australia and finally moves to live in the United States of America. Both narratives thus highlight the sense of estrangement of individuals living in a foreign environment, and owing to living in a city that is not

their own, their social deviation is further stressed through their physical as well as mental expatriation.

In Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd," while sitting at a coffee shop in London, the narrator looks through the window at the people pacing along the street, who are representatives of the different social strata that give shape to English society, from the upper classes to the lower classes and even petty criminals who live outside the law. From his perspective as an outsider in a society that is not his own, the narrator plays the part of a social commentator, but he gradually leaves behind his role as a mere observer to join the multitude that he was initially staring on at a distance. And yet, as a counterpart to the man of the crowd, and by extension, as an outsider, the narrator still appears to retain his individuality in spite of walking in the midst of the social mass, which sanctions his double-positioning as joining it, but nevertheless, standing out of this foreign society. In a similar way, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford*, its main character is able to gain insight into the clearly hierarchical quality that characterises English society and that obliges him to adopt a different personality when socialising with the members of the upper and lower classes within the social spectrum. Likewise, given his dual positioning as a member of the privileged classes by birth as well as a member of a gang of thieves, Paul is unable to fit in the highly-stratified society that prevails in England, and, upon being tried in court, when the death penalty he is initially allotted is finally commuted to exile, he is expatriated to Australia, thus ultimately sanctioning his condition as an outsider in front of the collectivity. In fact, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, it is when Paul Clifford finally moves to the United States of America – after his exile in Australia – that he manages to make a name for himself in a foreign society in which his hard work and ingenuity, rather than any inherited fortunes or family connections, are eventually praised and rewarded.

In this respect, the differing attitude taken towards the figure of the individual and the collectivity on both sides of the Atlantic as portrayed in Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* and Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" appears to reflect the transatlantic social patterns that Christopher Mulvey observes in the English and American societies of the nineteenth-century. According to Mulvey, in the early nineteenth-century, there was a

tendency in England to make stronger distinctions between classes, whereas, in the United States, the inclination was towards a simplification of class roles.⁵¹ Likewise, Mulvey also contends that the model of manners often displayed in the United Kingdom was mainly monarchical and hierarchical, while the distinguishing features of American manners in the nineteenth-century – which were mostly based on good temper and restraint – were cherished inasmuch as they were considered effective for doing business.⁵² Accordingly, as Mulvey further claims, in the nineteenth-century, the English appeared to be very eager to have a place in society and make the social order appear to be one with the natural order, while the American temperament mostly advocated for a society fond of denying differences of class.⁵³ These transatlantic differences in the social patterns of the English and the Americans became more evident when an individual – of English or American nationality – was placed against the background of a foreign city on the other shore of the Atlantic.

Poe envisioned “The Man of the Crowd” while he was living in Philadelphia, even if, significantly enough, his tale depicts scenes of London life which he probably recollected from his stay in the English metropolis with the Allans during his adolescence. The uniqueness of the stranger whom the narrator follows along the streets of London and that turns him into the epitome of the individual figure that stands out in the crowd may ultimately respond to his condition as an expatriate. Drawing on a biographical interpretation of the story, the never-ending walk of the man of the crowd around London reflects Poe’s recurring memories of his youth spent in England, comprising his feelings of regret for being deprived of the kind of life and social position that he had aspired to, as well as his reveries of what his life might have been like had he remained in England and had he been legally accepted as a member of the Allan family. Personifying the character of the narrator, Poe finds himself back in the streets of London – as he recalled them from his youth – in pursuit of the sort of life that

⁵¹ Christopher Mulvey. *Transatlantic Manners: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 12.

⁵² Christopher Mulvey. *Transatlantic Manners: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 111.

⁵³ Christopher Mulvey. *Transatlantic Manners: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 159.

he felt entitled to possess, but that eventually was harshly taken from him. In this respect, the man of the crowd in the story embodies Poe's alternative existence, inasmuch as the stranger is characterised by the qualities that Poe appeared to lack, since the man of the crowd is depicted as old and residing in London. Likewise, the eventual revelation in Poe's tale that the stranger has committed theft underscores the author's feelings of having been tricked, since the stranger in his story – whom the narrator is following closely – is living the sort of life that Poe had envisioned for himself, thus, even if metaphorically, the stranger's actual crime is having deprived Poe of his alternate existence.

Following the interpretation that the narrator's fascination with the man of the crowd lies in the fact that the former feels identified with the latter, it could be argued that, upon envisioning a tale portraying his alternate existence in London, Poe anticipated Otto Rank's premise that the past necessarily clings to oneself and even becomes one's fate when the individual tries to get rid of it.⁵⁴ In this respect, as Lawrence Poston claims, in his tales about the double figure – as is the case with "The Man of the Crowd" – Poe appeared to emulate Bulwer-Lytton's fable "Monos and Daimonos,"⁵⁵ inasmuch as this narrative ultimately argues that there is no such state as true aloneness, as the individual is always haunted by a being that he cannot possibly disclaim, which arises as an alternative existence of his own.⁵⁶ Poe's realisation that the hopes that he had nourished had ultimately vanished led him to recreate this alternate existence – in an attempt to exorcise it – in a series of tales he would write at the time, whose action was set in England.⁵⁷ In this sense, as he will eventually recount in one of his pieces within his *Marginalia*, Poe seemed to cling to his belief that "if you wish to

⁵⁴ Otto Rank. *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. [Trans. Harry Tucker] (Harry Tucker. Ed. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1971): 7.

⁵⁵ Bulwer-Lytton's fable "Monos and Daimonos" was first published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in May 1830, and it was subsequently republished in Bulwer-Lytton's volume *The Student: A Series of Papers* in its second volume in 1836.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Poston. "Bulwer's Godwinian Myth." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 81.

⁵⁷ At this stage, Poe would publish a series of tales whose action was set in England, as is the case with "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling," "The Man of the Crowd," and "William Wilson."

forget anything upon the spot, make a note that this thing is to be remembered.”⁵⁸ The sort of life that Poe had envisioned for himself in his youth began to take shape during his early stay in England, where he got acquainted with the lifestyle and manners pertaining to the English, which he perceived as sharply differing from those that he would encounter upon his return to the United States. Actually, in his role as a social commentator, the narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” aptly observes:

The street was a narrow and long one, and his course lay within it for nearly an hour, during which the passengers had gradually diminished to about that number which is ordinarily seen at noon in Broadway near the Park – so vast a difference is there between a London populace and that of the most frequented American city.⁵⁹

By means of the comment above, the narrator is not only drawing attention to an important difference he perceives between two transatlantic metropolises such as London and New York, but he is also divulging his condition as an expatriate, and in particular, his situation as an American citizen in London. In this respect, as Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman notice, through tales such as “The Man of the Crowd,” Poe actually launches an unexpected social analysis of antebellum culture.⁶⁰ If through “The Man of the Crowd” Poe gives account of what might have been his alternative existence as living in London as an American, his condition as an expatriate also found its counterpart upon his coming back home, since, having spent many years of his early youth in England, Poe could hardly be said to have felt at home in the country of his birth.⁶¹ The physical as well as mental expatriation Poe might have felt at the time – as a foreigner in London, and as an individual estranged from his homeland in spite of his

⁵⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. “Marginalia – Part I.” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 15. (November 1844): 484, col. 1.

⁵⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Man of the Crowd.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1978): 512.

⁶⁰ Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman. “Introduction: Beyond ‘The Problem of Poe’.” (Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman. Eds. *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): xi.

⁶¹ Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman. “Introduction: Beyond ‘The Problem of Poe’.” (Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman. Eds. *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): ix.

American nationality – underscored his condition of individual as opposed to the collectivity at this stage of his life and propelled his individuation, and by extension, his aging process.

If Poe tackled the condition of expatriate in his tale “The Man of the Crowd,” Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Paul Clifford* portrays the deportation of its protagonist, since, when Paul is tried in court, the penalty imposed on him compels him to leave the country and remain exiled in Australia. Nonetheless, once the years of his expatriation in Australia come to a close, Paul goes to live to the United States, where he raises his family and succeeds as an entrepreneur. In this sense, Paul personifies the figure of the self-made man, who is capable of making a name for himself in a foreign country, without any inherited fortune or family connection, thus unveiling that making a new start and moving from rags to riches may only be feasible abroad, where individuals are not judged by the place they occupy in the social spectrum and society itself is not so highly hierarchical. In this respect, if in the country of his birth, Paul is ultimately turned into a criminal as a result of the inherent injustice that characterises the prevailing penal system, it is in America that his own invented name, ‘Clifford’ – as opposed to his actual family name, ‘Brandon’ – becomes widely known all over the place, as is recounted in the novel:

In a certain town of that Great Country, where shoes are imperfectly polished, and opinions are not prosecuted, there resided, twenty years after the date of Lucy Brandon’s departure from England, a man held in high and universal respect, not only for the rectitude of his conduct, but for the energies of his mind, and the purposes to which they were directed. If you asked who cultivated that waste? The answer was “Clifford!” Who procured the establishment of that hospital? “Clifford!” Who obtained the redress of such a public grievance? “Clifford!” Who struggled for and won such a popular benefit? “Clifford!”⁶²

As a politician, Bulwer-Lytton was well aware of the legislation regulating the relationships between Great Britain and its colonies, since, within the administration of Lord Derby and Lord Disraeli, he became Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1858. In spite of his short period in office, Bulwer-Lytton gained a significant insight into

⁶² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Paul Clifford*. (New York: International Book, 1848): 402.

colonial issues involving Canada, Australia, and the British Protectorate of the Ionian Islands in Greece, to the extent that he would even be offered the Kingdom of Greece.⁶³ As Leslie Mitchell claims, Bulwer-Lytton was an imperialist, but only on certain conditions, since he approached the imperial purpose in moral rather than economic terms, defending that the colonial people should be brought to a sense of self-sufficiency, and when they felt ready for independence, their request should be granted so that they became self-regulating as promptly as possible.⁶⁴ Above all, Bulwer-Lytton was well-aware of the potentialities attached to English colonies, where it was possible to leave the past behind and begin a new sort of life as an individual, detached from the former constraints often associated with social collectiveness. In this respect, as Charles Snyder argues, Bulwer-Lytton believed that the settlement colonies represented hope for the future, both for those who settled there and for those who remained in the metropolis.⁶⁵ Accordingly, as Snyder further claims, Bulwer-Lytton's approach to the colonial adventure mostly stressed its opportunity for business, as he perceived that British people of all classes could make a better life for themselves by means of emigrating to settlement colonies such as Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand,⁶⁶ as Bulwer-Lytton ultimately regarded emigration as an effective way of creating new opportunities for those who could not find work at home.

Drawing on his belief that the colonial people should ultimately acquire a sense of autonomy and their request for independence should eventually be granted, Bulwer-Lytton looked upon the United States of America as an example of a former English colony that had ultimately turned into a highly-successful country upon its independence, although their freedom had to be gained as a result of war, precisely owing to the reluctance of the metropolis to grant the American people their

⁶³ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 217.

⁶⁴ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 211.

⁶⁵ Charles Snyder. "Bulwer-Lytton and 'The Cult of the Colonies'." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 174.

⁶⁶ Charles Snyder. "Bulwer-Lytton and 'The Cult of the Colonies'." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 176.

independence. Bulwer-Lytton's admiration for the United States becomes ultimately reflected in his novel *Paul Clifford*, as it is only in that country that Paul is able to achieve success in life. In fact, scarcely two years after the publication of *Paul Clifford*, John Pendleton Kennedy – Poe's friend and literary patron – addressed a letter to Bulwer-Lytton, dated 26th June 1832, giving account of the English author's fondness for the United States of America. Together with his letter, Pendleton Kennedy sent Bulwer-Lytton a volume portraying the scenery of some areas within the United States, and stated that the reason for his writing was "the kindly impression made upon my countrymen by the good feelings you have so frequently evinced towards their institutions, and to the familiarity with which your name and writing are known at our firesides."⁶⁷ Pendleton Kennedy's words not only endorse Bulwer-Lytton's attachment to the United States of America, but they also unveil that Bulwer-Lytton was widely read as a Victorian author on the shore of the Atlantic. Likewise, it is significant to notice that, being a close friend of Poe's, John Pendleton Kennedy addressed a letter to Bulwer-Lytton, praising his literary works, and thus, becoming a sort of American connection between Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, in the same way as Charles Dickens, being a close friend of Bulwer-Lytton's, would ultimately meet Poe in the United States, thus symbolically turning into an English mediator between Bulwer-Lytton and Poe.

In short, Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd" and Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* underline the feeling of misplacement of their protagonists as a result of their expatriation, as in Poe's tale, the narrator strolls along the streets of London in pursuit of the man of the crowd, feeling alienated even if surrounded by the multitude, while, similarly, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Paul Clifford feels compelled to abandon his mother-country and the collectivity to which he had so far belonged to start a new kind of life in a different nation. Drawing on a biographical reading of these literary works, Poe was trying to exorcise the memories of his youth spent in London, had he remained in England and had his connection with the Allan family extended in time. Likewise, by means of turning his hero Paul Clifford into a successful self-made man in the United

⁶⁷ John Pendleton Kennedy. "Letter from John Pendleton Kennedy to Edward Bulwer-Lytton." Baltimore, 26th June 1832. Manuscript consulted at the Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertford, England.

States of America, Bulwer-Lytton was also metaphorically looking across the Atlantic at the American nation as a land of opportunities for the individual, mostly as a result of his knowledge as Secretary of State for the Colonies. Hence, at this stage of their life, both authors appeared to be missing an alternate existence that had vanished from their possibilities: Poe being the gentleman he had aspired to become during his youth in England, and Bulwer-Lytton being a self-made man released from the burden of social constraints and hierarchical divisions.

* * *

The fictions that both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe wrote at this stage of their lives, *Paul Clifford* and “The Man of the Crowd,” underline the important role played by the schism established between individualism and collectivity in the process of aging of the main characters of the narratives, and by extension, of the authors themselves, to the extent that the metaphorical dilemma between individuality and social collectiveness that both authors faced in this period can be interpreted as a significant turning-point in their lives. Accordingly, as reflected in their fictions, the authors underwent an individuation process, which, following Carl Jung’s premises, involves the integration of the personal and the collective so as to attain self-realisation, and eventually, maturity. In this respect, like the characters in their narratives, as individuals, they had to face memories from their personal past, as well as social expectations that drew them closer to the collectivity, but also apart from their family and social ascriptions, in order to attain their ultimate individuations. In this respect, they illustrated the Utilitarian principles that were endorsed at the time, which defended that social progress depended on individual self-fulfilment.

Likewise, this individuation process also manifests in the fictions through the individual rebellion of characters against society as they indulge in crime, while their endeavours in the midst of a treacherous urban environment further evinces their role as individuals in front of the multitude. In Poe’s tale, “The Man of the Crowd,” the narrator – as embodiment of the figure of the *flâneur*, as portrayed by Charles

Baudelaire – concurrently illustrates being part of the social mass and standing apart from it, while he also enacts the dilemma of preserving the individual autonomy in the face of social forces. The pressure on behalf of the social collectivity is perceived as even more prominent in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, which denounces the unjust measures of a penal system that contribute to criminalising the individual. In this respect, the metaphor of the penal institution of the panopticon, as depicted by Michel Foucault, brings to the fore the ‘unequal gaze’ on behalf of social institutions to which Paul is permanently subjected in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel.

In these fictions of crime, the act of theft on behalf of individuals ultimately becomes a metaphor for appropriating what is their own – as is the case with the property of their ancestors as happens to Paul in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, or even an alternate existence they had envisioned for themselves, as the narrator in Poe’s tale evinces – while the collectivity passes judgement on these individuals and considers their acts as illegitimate and unlawful. Drawing on biographical facts with respect to the authors, the metaphor of theft also discloses traumatic events in the life of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe that underline their detachment from their respective father figures, particularly, bearing in mind Bulwer-Lytton’s being chosen as heir to the detriment of his father, and the accusation that Poe had to face upon being suspected of having stolen some valuables from the Allan household. Even if symbolically, the metaphorical act of theft contributes to sanctioning their individuation, as well as their ultimate detachment from the collectivity.

Furthermore, the fact of disregarding a family name and forging a name of his own sanctions Paul’s will to detach himself from the collectivity in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, while his need to adopt a different identity – and thus, a different name – in his intercourse with the upper and lower social classes further evinces Paul’s ongoing individuation process, as he feels metaphorically pulled by his ‘persona’ as well as his ‘shadow,’ to use Carl Jung’s terms. Likewise, the use of family names, as reflected in their fictions, also became a matter for concern for both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, as they perceived that their different surnames underscored their allegiance to their family, but also their need, at the time, to make a name for themselves and forge a name of their

own. As the conclusion of Bulwer-Lytton's novel illustrates, Paul ultimately manages to escape from social constraints, owing to the fact that he belongs to the upper class but also as a result of having to face unjust penal laws, and under the name he has forged on his own, he starts a new life overseas.

Finally, the feeling of expatriation that befalls the main characters in Poe's tale and Bulwer-Lytton's novel further contributes to reinforcing their detachment from the collectiveness to which they have so far belonged. In this respect, the fact of living in a foreign environment underlines the alienation of individuals as is the case of the narrator in Poe's tale, but it also underpins the opportunity for individuals to succeed in a foreign land as happens to Paul in Bulwer-Lytton's novel. In relation to the authors themselves, the portrayal of expatriation in their fictions reveals Poe's nostalgia for the lost past and the alternate existence as a gentleman he had coveted for long had he remained on the other shore of the Atlantic, as well as Bulwer-Lytton's appealing prospects for the colonies as a politician, as well as his admiration for the figure of the self-made man, especially given his social background as an aristocrat. Hence, the outcome of these respective fictions – as Paul in Bulwer-Lytton's novel lives in America and the narrator in Poe's tale strolls along the streets of London – reveals the exaltation of the individuation process as a way to know oneself, and eventually, move further in the course of aging.

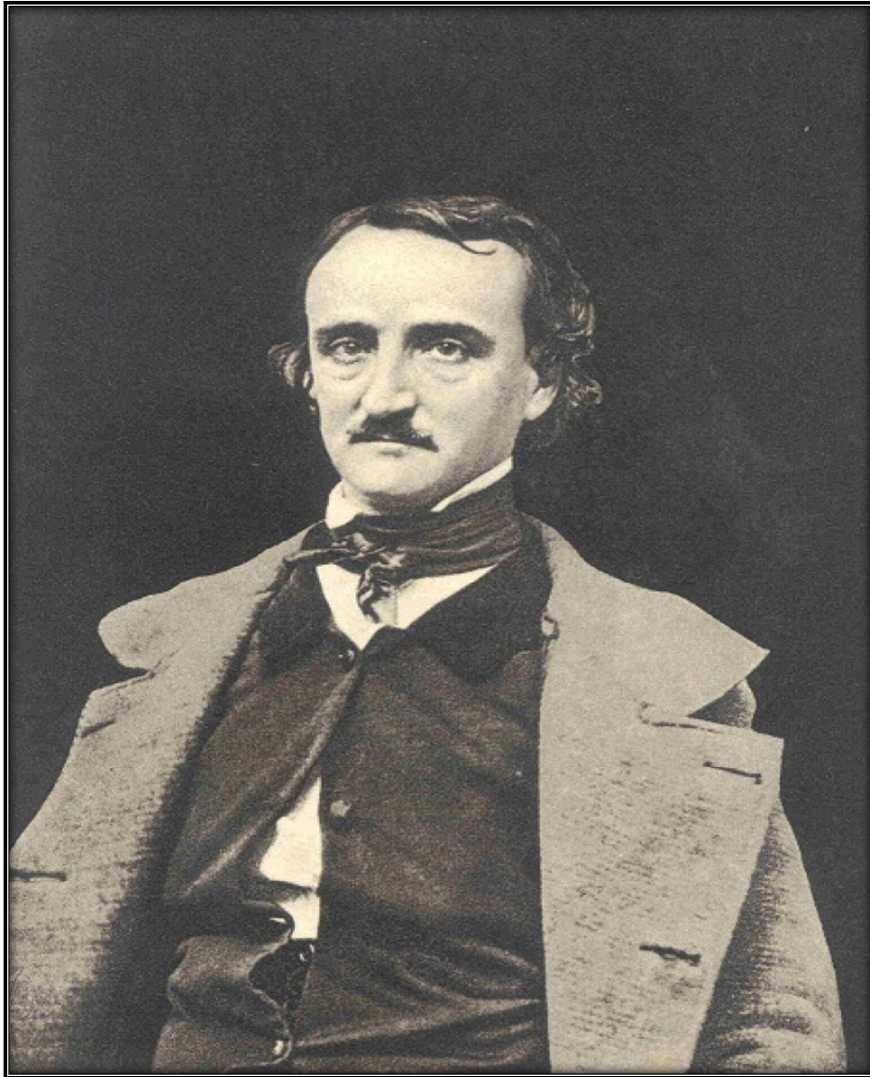


Figure 6 - Poe in the 'Whitman' daguerreotype, in 1848.

Taken from: Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*.

(Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989): 43.

Chapter Four

A Matter of Guilt: Crime, Blame, and Expiation in *Eugene Aram* and “Thou Art the Man”

When Bulwer-Lytton and Poe published their respective fictions *Eugene Aram* (1832) and “Thou Art the Man” (1844), they had acquired popular and critical acclaim as authors of renowned literary pieces and had also made a name for themselves, having established their public status as writers of literary fiction. The crime narratives they wrote at this time of anxiety and personal disquiet – “Thou Art the Man” and *Eugene Aram* – are indicative of the feelings befalling their authors, especially inasmuch as Poe would find himself caught in a literary battle with other writers from whom he tried to defend himself, while Bulwer-Lytton would have to bear harsh criticism for having written a novel featuring an individual guilty of murder as its hero. Both authors canalised this troublesome situation they were made to bear on the literary stage in a different manner, as Poe would resort to blame and accusation – as his tale “Thou Art the Man” reflects – while Bulwer-Lytton would develop some guilt and need for public expiation, as evoked in his novel *Eugene Aram* and the subsequent writings he would publish in defence of his crime fiction.

On a personal level, at this stage of their lives, both authors had grown physically-, and especially, emotionally-detached from their parental backgrounds, and, having raised families of their own, they worked feverishly to earn a living, devoting most of their time to writing, which would also cause trouble within their own respective families, as the authors struggled to find the seclusion they needed in order to write. With respect to his family background, Poe felt definitively debarred from the Allan household, when, upon the death of his foster father, John Allan, he realised that,

in spite of his close attachment to the Allans for most of his childhood and youth, he had not been legally adopted and his name was omitted from John Allan's will, thus sanctioning his exclusion from the Allan family. Similarly, Bulwer-Lytton also grew estranged from his mother upon his marriage against his mother's wish, which resulted in his being deprived of his rightful allowance as heir. As suggestive of their personal situation in relation to their parental background, the fictions that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe would publish at the time, *Eugene Aram* and "Thou Art the Man" – even if significantly different in their tone, as Bulwer-Lytton's novel consists in a tragic psychological profile of the figure of the hero-criminal, while Poe's tale is an eminently satirical detective narrative – symbolically depict the demise of parental figures and narrate how, in their absence, individuals metaphorically internalise the moralising role of this absent parent throughout their personal process of aging. In this respect, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram*, following the mysterious disappearance of his father, Walter Lester decides to set off on a journey in search of his absent parent that will also allow him to unmask his antagonist, the revered scholar Eugene Aram, and will help him regain his legitimate place within the Lester family. Similarly, in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," when the wealthiest patriarch in town, Barnabas Shuttleworthy, disappears, even though all suspicions fall on his reckless nephew, Pennifeather, a detective unravels the case, ultimately accusing Barnabas' close friend, Charles Goodfellow, of murder, and exonerating Pennifeather, who is thus ratified as his uncle's legitimate heir.

The fictions that both authors wrote at the time, *Eugene Aram* and "Thou Art the Man," would also mark a decisive moment in their literary careers, insofar as, with respect to Poe's tale, Vincent Buranelli claims that it represented a critical step forward in the handling of the psychology of the detective story,¹ while, in relation to Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Nancy Jane Tyson argues that Bulwer-Lytton himself considered *Eugene Aram* in retrospect, regarding it as an important turning-point in his career and

¹ Vincent Buranelli. *Edgar Allan Poe*. (New York: Twayne, 1961): 80.

the first product of his maturity.² In addition, in relation to the process of aging of the authors, these two literary fictions reflect significant biographical aspects befalling Bulwer-Lytton and Poe at the time, such as their positioning regarding the absence of the parent figure and the psychological effect this would have on them as individuals, their increasing attraction as well as hatred for the solitary figure of the intellectual man as reflective of their condition as writers, and how the legal as well as philosophical notions of blame and guilt, which also befell the authors on a symbolical level at the time both as individuals and writers, are canalised and ultimately solved in their respective crime fictions.

Bulwer-Lytton and Poe internalising the moralising role of the absent parent

Following the Freudian structural model of the psyche, as theorised in the seminal essay “*Das Ich und das Es*” (1923) – that is, “The Ego and the Id” – the part of the psychic apparatus known as ‘the *Über-Ich*’ or ‘*superego*’ plays a critical and moralising role in the human psyche, as it is responsible for repressing the instinctual trends on behalf of the part of the psychic apparatus named ‘*das Es*’ or ‘the *id*,’ that is, the unorganised part of the personality structure that comprises the human basic drives. In this context, ‘*das Ich*’ or ‘the *ego*,’ which acts according to the reality principle – and thus, represents reason and common sense – is in charge of mediating between the demands made on behalf of ‘the *superego*’ and the instinctual desires of ‘the *id*.’³ Drawing on this structural model of the psyche, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe contended with this tripartite notion involved in ‘their selves,’ as ‘their *ego*’ interceded between the surrounding social and cultural regulations that influenced ‘their *superego*,’ and the repressed dispositions arising from painful memories and personal disappointments that gave shape to ‘their *id*’. In this respect, both authors had to cope with social expectations placed on them given their public status as increasingly-acclaimed authors – which became embodiments of ‘their *superego*’ – their own personal wishes and ambitions as

² Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 82.

³ Sigmund Freud. *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. [Trans. James Strachey] (Angela Richards. Ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Freud Library, 1991).

individuals – which personified ‘their *ego*’ – and some haunting feelings of guilt and blame – which represented ‘their *id*’ – as a result of the personal circumstances they had to endure at the time with regard to their parental background, their current situation with their own respective families, and the demanding position within the literary profession.

Living on their own and having become estranged from their family households, it can be argued that, in the absence of their parents – and by extension, of any ideal model in which they could mirror themselves – at this stage of their process of aging, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe developed a sort of surrogate parental figure – that is, a marked sense of ‘the *superego*’ – that they incorporated into ‘their self’ at the time, thus internalising the moralising role of the absent parent, which would sanction their advance onto the stage of maturity. However, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe canalised the internalisation of the moral rules that an increasingly growing presence of the figure of ‘the *superego*’ brought along in a significantly different way. As a matter of fact, the narratives that they wrote at this stage of their lives, especially within the genre of crime fiction, as is the case of Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe’s tale “Thou Art the Man,” were suggestive of this developed sense of ‘the *superego*’ that marked the battle between right and wrong, and yet, they placed emphasis on different outcomes. With regard to Poe, the internalisation of moral rules in the absence of a father figure ultimately resulted in a marked sense of blame and accusation, as the narrator in the story “Thou Art the Man” shows when he unravels a case of murder, rightly accusing Charles Goodfellow – a socially-esteemed man – as guilty of murder, and finally, acquitting Pennifeather – a social outcast – of the criminal charges unjustly brought against him. Conversely, though, Bulwer-Lytton’s marked sense of ‘the *superego*’ at the time was articulated through a feeling of guilt, which was exposed in his crime novel *Eugene Aram* through a character that has to cope with remorse for a misdeed of his past, until his crime is brought to light, and through his accusation and ultimate punishment, he is alleged to find some redemption.

On a personal level, in Poe’s case, upon realising that he had been excluded from John Allan’s will and that his relationship with the Allan family had taken a turn

for the worse, Poe was forced to leave behind his aspiration to become John Allan's heir, and instead, he began to forge an alluring public image with the aim to make a respectable name for himself – regardless of the Allans – that would make up for the absence of the social prospects that he had aspired to obtain and from which he had bitterly been debarred. Accordingly, in the absence of John Allan as a father figure, together with the social prospects associated with him, Poe internalised a surrogate parental figure and a marked sense of the presence of 'the *superego*' in his self. In this sense, Poe felt compelled to forge his public image – even if, on occasions, this implied being unfaithful to the truth – thus endowing himself with an enthralling family background, taking pride in the achievements of the Poe family – especially of his paternal grandfather in the military field – the important social connections he had established through his marriage to Virginia Clemm, and his own remarkable academic background, having been educated for years in Great Britain. In contrast, though, a haunting sense of 'the *id*,' of the repressed drives, also emerged to counteract this internalised moralising role at this stage of his life. Hence, even if Poe resorted to this idealistic self-created social image, this public profile that he had created on his own was often counterbalanced by a less alluring image that underlined Poe's frustration and temperamental outbursts at the time, and was brought to the fore through his lapses into alcoholism, mostly on account of his wife's rapidly-declining condition and the pressures that he had to bear in his occupation as an editor and writer, as he gradually gained insight into the animosity that sometimes characterised the relationships among members of the literary profession.

Similarly, with respect to Bulwer-Lytton, even though his relationship with his mother improved remarkably in spite of having got married without her consent, his determination to reject his mother's reinstatement of his allowance, having previously disavowed him, would then sanction his liberation from his mother's influence and his will to take the reins of his life. Likewise, as some of his previous novels had sold well, Bulwer-Lytton had begun to acquire popularity among his readership, as well as significant acclaim on behalf of contemporary critics and fellow writers. Hence, at this stage of his life, having grown progressively detached from a parental figure, such as his

mother, and having gained considerable awareness of himself as a public figure on the literary stage, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton developed an internalised role of the parental figure, and an acute awareness of the existence of ‘the *superego*’ within himself, which resulted in his need to grow detached from his noble origins at the time, and instead, isolate himself and devote his life to writing in order to earn a living of his own. And yet, as also happened to Poe, the profound internalisation of these moral rules on behalf of the figure of ‘the *superego*’ were often counteracted by the outbreak of some instinctual drives: Bulwer-Lytton would spend long periods of time in self-imposed seclusion, which would eventually trigger a gradual estrangement from his wife; he would also lapse into compulsive smoking; and he would often lose his temper upon being publicly accused of writing crime fiction only to suit popular demands.

As indicative of the personal situations that both authors were going through at the time, Poe’s tale “Thou Art the Man” and Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Eugene Aram* consist in narratives that depict the symbolic demise of a father figure and the subsequent internalisation of the role of this absent parent on behalf of a character, who plays the part of a detective, unravels the mystery, and symbolically avenges the death of the absent parental figure. In Poe’s tale “Thou Art the Man,” when the wealthy and aged Barnabas Shuttleworthy is found murdered, all suspicions fall onto his irresponsible and immature nephew, Pennifeather, while the highly-respected and aged Charles Goodfellow mourns the death of his close friend recently departed. Nonetheless, Poe’s tale shows that first impressions are necessarily deceitful, since a socially-acclaimed character such as Charles Goodfellow is found guilty of murder, while an apparently reckless individual such as Pennifeather is proved to be innocent and is eventually absolved. In this respect, the narrator in Poe’s tale, as a symbolic embodiment of the author’s *ego*, tries to shed light on this criminal case, metaphorically mediating between Charles Goodfellow and Pennifeather, inasmuch as these characters present alternate features attributed to both the psychic figures of ‘the *superego*’ and ‘the *id*.’ As a socially-acclaimed and aged character, Charles Goodfellow apparently represents a social ideal that renders him closer to ‘the *superego*,’ and yet, his ultimate cunning and treacherous ways in forging himself a fake, respectable social background,

and especially, in slaying his friend Barnabas, clearly brings him closer to the instinctive figure of 'the *id*.' Conversely, Pennifeather is apparently presented as a despicable and irresponsible young man – hence, a clear embodiment of the psychic figure of 'the *id*' – and yet, his innocence and his ultimate inclusion in his uncle's will as his legal heir sanction his condition as a member of a privileged social set, thus showing himself to be an embodiment of the social ideal characterising 'the psychic *superego*.'

In a metaphorical way, at this stage of his process of aging, Poe's symbolic *ego* also struggled between these two poles, since, having left behind his family bond with the Allans, he aspired to a social ideal that had been denied him, but in order to achieve the social position he coveted, he resorted to deception, as he granted himself a background that, in truth, he did not possess. The outcome of Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," for the most part, is intended to lay the blame on the character of Charles Goodfellow as the embodiment of Poe's '*id*' and exonerate Pennifeather as the personification of Poe's '*superego*,' and it is in this respect that Poe's tale can be described as self-moralising, inasmuch as it symbolically articulates Poe's internalisation of the critical role of the absent parental figure on his way to maturity as personified by the character of Pennifeather, while it also acquires a self-accusatory tone, insofar as it exposes Poe's own deceitful ways in forging his social background as exemplified by the character of Charles Goodfellow.

In analogy with Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* also enacts the symbolic death of a father-figure, the figurative incorporation of a surrogate parental figure into 'the self' as suggestive of the process of maturation, and the final accusation and punishment of the criminal in order to avenge the demise of this parental figure. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram is highly revered as a scholar and is perceived as a superior individual owing to his intellectual gifts, although he soon raises the suspicion of Walter Lester, Rowland Lester's dissipated nephew, as, when caught unawares, Eugene Aram is often found mumbling to himself, as if some dark secret was haunting him. Following the mysterious disappearance of his father, Walter Lester decides to set off on a journey to find him, and upon his return, not only does he

manage to prove that this accomplished scholar is indeed very far removed from the respectable image he projects, but Walter Lester is also able to charge Eugene Aram with the murder of his father, Geoffrey Lester, and thus, regain his often questioned place in the Lester family. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the narrative is mostly focalised on the character of Eugene Aram, who turns into the hero-criminal of the story, although the omniscient narrator in the novel gradually draws attention to Walter Lester, who replaces Eugene Aram in his role as the hero of the novel. Hence, in contrast with Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," in which the narrator is the detective of the story who mediates in the symbolic battle between Charles Goodfellow and Pennifeather, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the omniscient narrator rather focuses on Eugene Aram's perspective for most part of the narrative, and pays considerably less attention to the figure of the detective, personified by Walter Lester, who turns into a secondary character in comparison with the protagonism that Eugene Aram acquires in the novel. As a character, this scholar-criminal is also characterised through ambivalent features pertaining to the different psychic parts of the Freudian mental structure, such as the 'superego' – inasmuch as Eugene Aram is highly-respected as an accomplished scholar – and 'the id' – insofar as his tormented looks and bizarre soliloquies in the forest bring to the fore the repressed memories of a misdeed in his past that he cannot prevent from emerging. Conversely, if Eugene Aram is socially-acclaimed as a respectable man, the young Walter Lester is apparently categorised as the irresponsible nephew of Rowland Lester, who has taken care of him since his brother, Geoffrey Lester, disappeared in strange circumstances, and thus, Walter Lester is mostly associated with features that bring him closer to the embodiment of the psychic category of the 'id.' However, his success at unmasking Eugene Aram's true nature and at avenging his father's death ultimately sanctions his restitution as a member of the Lester family, which is further validated through his marriage to Randolph Lester's daughter Ellinor and the ultimate fulfilment of his social aspirations pertaining to the ideals of his psychic 'superego.'

Bulwer-Lytton's symbolic *ego* also struggled between these two psychic parts of the Freudian mental structure, insofar as he aspired to earn a living of his own and make a name for himself, thus showing a wish for independence and maturity belonging to the

psychic figure of ‘the *superego*,’ even though his individualistic ambition to devote his life to writing would also draw him detached from his wife and friends, and would play a significant role in the failure of his marriage, which cemented a repressed, even if profound, sense of guilt, as indicative of the overwhelming presence of the psychic figure of ‘the *id*’ in his life. Hence, although Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Eugene Aram*, in its conclusion, mostly exonerates the character of Walter Lester – as the personification of ‘the *superego*’ – and accuses as well as reproves Eugene Aram – as the embodiment of ‘the *id*’ – the centrality that the hero-criminal acquires in the novel places more emphasis on Eugene Aram’s guilt and expiation rather than on Walter Lester’s allegations against Aram. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel underscores its author’s internalisation of the moralising role of the figure of the absent parent at this stage of his life with the view to exorcise his guilt and expiate himself.

Within the Freudian structural model of the psyche, the psychic figure of ‘the *superego*’ involves the internalisation of cultural regulations, insofar as Freud envisioned this concept as the combination between the *ego* ideal, and the conscience, which is the psychic agency that guarantees that satisfaction from the *ego* ideal is ensured.⁴ Hence, this part of the personality structure comprises the ideals of the *ego*, as well as the sense of right and wrong, which prohibits instinctive drives and castigates misbehaviour with feelings of guilt. The character of ‘the *superego*’ thus takes on the influence of those individuals who have played the role of the parental figure and who are regarded as ideal models, and it is in this sense that its formation takes place during the process of dissolution of the phase of the Oedipus complex and is established by the identification with the parental figure. In this sense, the *superego* compels the *ego* to be like the father, but also places an injunction on the *ego*, insofar as it compels not to take the father’s place. In his seminal essay “The Ego and the Id,” Freud contended that “the *superego* retains the character of the father, while the more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression [...] the stricter will be the domination of the *superego* over the *ego* later on – in the form of conscience or

⁴ Sigmund Freud. *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. [Trans. James Strachey] (Angela Richards. Ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Freud Library, 1991).

perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt.”⁵ Accordingly, in the absence of the parental figure, it is claimed that the *ego* is controlled by the figure of the *superego*, which turns into a surrogate father figure that is internalised and plays a critical and moralising role.

The symbolic internalisation of this surrogate parental figure in the absence of its actual counterpart became particularly poignant at this stage of the lives of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, and as indicative of this internalised moral role, the authors gained insight into their parts as successors of their absent parents, and through the prevalence of their ideal *ego* and their consciousness within their *superego*, they found themselves questioning their position with respect to their absent parental figures. In this sense, they grew concerned about the dichotomy between their legal and legitimate condition in their symbolic role as successors of their respective parental figures, insofar as legal successors, they complied with the law, whereas, as legitimate heirs, they became morally and ethically acceptable with respect to their part as successors of the parental figure. In his seminal essay “Civilization and Its Discontents” (1930), Freud introduced the concept of the cultural *superego* and stated that the demands of the individual *superego* should coincide with the precepts of the prevailing cultural *superego*, since the cultural development of the group and that of the individual are always interlocked.⁶ It is in this sense that the concepts of legality, as indicative of the cultural *superego*, and of legitimacy, as suggestive of an individual *superego*, necessarily influence one another.

The sense of exclusion that Poe felt upon realising that he had not been considered as a beneficiary of his foster father’s will brought to the fore the conflict between the notions of legality and legitimacy – as embodiments of the cultural and individual *superego*, respectively – insofar as he recognised that he had not been categorised as a legal successor of his foster father, but nevertheless, he considered himself a legitimate heir, as he had been raised in the Allan household and had spent his childhood and part of his youth with the Allans. In contrast, with respect to Bulwer-

⁵ Sigmund Freud. “The Ego and the Id.” [Trans. James Strachey] (James Strachey. Ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX (1923-25). London: Vintage, 1961).

⁶ Sigmund Freud. “Civilisation and Its Discontents.” [Trans. James Strachey] (Albert Dickson. Ed. *Civilisation, Society, and Religion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Freud Library, 1985).

Lytton, when in his childhood, he was designated as heir to his mother's, that is, the Lytton estate, despite being the youngest son, his mother's decision placed him in an intricate position concerning the rest of his siblings, and especially, with regard to his father, who objected to his wife's pronouncement. Thus, in Bulwer-Lytton's case, even if he was categorised as a legal successor, as he came of age, he began to cast some doubts on whether, according to his personal ethics, he could consider himself a legitimate heir, given the circumstances that had entitled him as such. In this respect, having been raised through the strict influence of a parental figure, his notion of the *superego* became more acute and even betrayed a feeling of guilt. This sentiment became more pronounced at this stage of his life when his mother deprived him of his rightful allowance upon his marriage, and subsequently, when she was willing to reinstate the allowance to her son, Bulwer-Lytton felt determined to reject it. These latent notions of legality and legitimacy with respect to their role as successors of their respective parental figures – as symptomatic of the symbolic part that the cultural and individual *superego* played at this time in their lives – is constantly evoked in their fictions *Eugene Aram* and "Thou Art the Man," insofar as both narratives address the intricate relationship that an individual develops with the figure of an absent parent, the way in which this paternal connection plays a major role in his process of aging, and how this character is symbolically sanctioned not only as legal but also as legitimate heir. In this respect, Walter Lester in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and Pennifeather in Poe's tale are designated as parental figures such as Geoffrey Lester and Barnabas Shuttleworthy, but characters such as Eugene Aram and Charles Goodfellow, in spite of their condition as outsiders, manage to gain the favours of these parental figures – and thus, the notion of legitimacy in their view – to the extent that they even occupy a more advantageous position than their legal heirs.

In relation to some of Bulwer-Lytton's crime novels such as *Eugene Aram*, Allan Conrad Christensen argues that these works deal with the theme of inheritance so persistently that they often imply that "the dead have communicated their values and

destinies to the living,”⁷ so that the protagonists of these novels look into the heritage from the past in order to discover the principle of order in their lives and age accordingly. In this respect, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, the murder that Eugene Aram commits acquires a major significance when, years later, the actual identity of his victim, who concealed himself under the appellative of Daniel Clarke, is eventually revealed. When Eugene Aram becomes a favourite of his uncle Randolph and also betroths the woman that he loves in secret, his cousin Madeline, Walter Lester decides to leave his family with the aim of searching for his lost father, Geoffrey Lester. Yet also, in a highly symbolic way, his journey responds to his need to gain legitimacy as heir to the Lester family, which he perceives to be in jeopardy by the threatening presence of Eugene Aram, whom Rowland Lester begins to consider his own son. Hence, leaving behind the irresponsible and immature ways that characterised him in youth, in his father’s absence, Walter Lester metaphorically internalises the moralising role of the absent parent, and develops a great sense of commitment, which contributes to sanctioning him not only as legal, but also, as legitimate heir of the Lester family. In the course of his journey, not only does he solve the mysterious disappearance of his father, but he also manages to accuse the man who was responsible for his father’s death and unmask Eugene Aram’s terrible secret. Upon his return, Walter Lester accuses Eugene Aram in the following terms:

‘Mark me, man!’ said Walter, fixing his eyes on Aram’s countenance. ‘The name of Daniel Clarke was a feigned name; the real name was Geoffrey Lester: that murdered Lester was my father, and the brother of him whose daughter, had I not come today, you would have called your wife!’

Aram felt, while these words were uttered, that the eyes of all in the room were on him; and perhaps that knowledge enabled him not to reveal by outward sign what must have passed within during the awful trial of that moment.⁸

Walter Lester’s public exposure of Eugene Aram as the murderer of his father seeks to avenge the memory of his departed parent, but it also responds to Walter’s wish to

⁷ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 56.

⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 308.

vindicate himself as the legitimate heir of his family as opposed to Eugene Aram, whom Walter regards as an outsider who has threatened to destabilise his family and lay claim over Rowland Lester's inheritance through his intended marriage to Madeline. In the absence of a parental figure, Walter Lester thus develops an acute notion of the *superego*, which leads him to vindicate the memory of his father, avenge his death, and ensure his legitimacy as heir, since his condition as rightful successor is eventually sanctioned upon his marriage to his cousin Ellinor Lester, given the fact that her sister, Madeline – with whom Walter was initially in love – dies tragically after her fiancé, Eugene Aram, is publicly charged with the murder of her uncle. Accordingly, the fact that, by the end of the novel, Walter Lester is hailed not only as legal, but most importantly, as legitimate successor of the Lesters echoes Bulwer-Lytton's own concern about his legitimate right to be the legal heir of the Lyttons, following his mother's determination.

In a similar way, the notion of legal and legitimate inheritance also plays a prominent role in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," as the characters of Pennifeather and Charles Goodfellow find themselves on opposite sides of the spectrum to lay claim over Barnabas Shuttleworthy's bequest after his mysterious disappearance, and eventually, violent death. Pennifeather, who is a close relative of Barnabas, possesses a devious reputation, and his ruthless and irresponsible ways apparently deprive him of his legitimacy as heir, in spite of the fact that he is acknowledged as his uncle's lawful successor. Conversely, Charles Goodfellow, who is an outsider recently arrived in town, is gladly accepted within the highly-respected circles of society and establishes a close comradeship with the wealthy Barnabas to the extent that, from the perspective of most citizens in town, Charles Goodfellow appears to be more legitimatised to become the successor of his friend Barnabas than his nephew and actual legal heir, Pennifeather. In fact, as a result of Pennifeather's apparent lack of legitimacy in his condition as heir, the contents of his uncle's will – inasmuch as they may include or exclude Pennifeather as his legal successor – are alleged to play a decisive role not only in determining his quality as heir, but also in inculcating him or exonerating him from the death of his

uncle. In this respect, the narrator in Poe's tale explains these circumstances in the following terms:

His uncle had threatened him, after making a will in his favour, with disinheritance. But the threat had not actually been kept; the original will, it appeared, had not been altered. *Had* it been altered, the only supposable motive for murder on the part of the suspected would have been the ordinary one of revenge; and even this would have been counteracted by the hope of reinstatement into the good graces of the uncle. But the will being unaltered, while the threat to alter remained suspended over the nephew's head, there appears at once the very strongest possible inducement for the atrocity.⁹

In fact, as the narrator concedes, in what appears to be a paradox, the contents of the will that designate Pennifeather as legal heir also provide evidence to charge him with murder, inasmuch as being the legal recipient of his uncle's fortune inevitably entails that, from a public perspective, he is also considered his virtual murderer. This ironic contradiction brings to the fore the legal schism separating the notion of legality from that of legitimacy, as Pennifeather is the legal heir but lacks legitimacy, while Goodfellow is deprived of the lawful right to claim any inheritance but appears to be publicly endowed with enough legitimacy to do so. In fact, it is not until the narrator and detective of the tale finds enough evidence to inculcate Charles Goodfellow as the murderer of Barnabas Shuttleworthy – and thus, exculpate Pennifeather from the charges brought against him – that the latter regains the legitimacy as heir that had previously been put into question, while Charles Goodfellow, who was thought to have the legitimacy over Barnabas's legacy that his nephew appeared to lack, ends up with neither the lawfulness nor the legitimacy to claim over Barnabas' bequest. Likewise, in the absence of his uncle, who symbolically plays the role of a parental figure to him, Pennifeather internalises this moralising role – as metaphorically suggestive of his *superego* – thus not only acquiring the maturity he lacked but also being publicly respected after regaining the legitimacy he first appeared to lack.

⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Thou Art the Man." (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1051-1052.

According to Stuart Levine and Susan Levine, the relationship between Barnabas Shuttleworthy and his nephew, Pennifeather, in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" clearly evokes the bond between its author and John Allan.¹⁰ Having spent most of his childhood and some years of his youth with the Allans, Poe might have thought of himself as John Allan's virtual successor, even though he was never legally adopted, and upon John Allan's death, Poe was explicitly disregarded as his legal heir, especially as his foster father had also raised his own family and possessed legal inheritors of his own. At this stage of his life, Poe gained insight into the difference between the notions of legality and legitimacy, as, even if he was not declared John Allan's legal heir, Poe felt that he was morally or ethically entitled to his foster father's legacy, and thus, he claimed legitimacy as his neglected foster son. In this respect, Poe might have identified with his character Pennifeather, insofar as his legitimacy is initially questioned in the tale, but also in the character of Charles Goodfellow, inasmuch as he claims a faked legitimacy that is not sanctioned by legality and even causes him to be publicly ostracised, thus coming to the conclusion that both notions – legality and legitimacy – should come hand-in-hand.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," a patriarchal figure is murdered and subsequently replaced by an heir who is requested to show his legitimacy, while an outsider threatens to usurp the role of this absent father figure until he is defeated by his legitimate successor. Hence, when Eugene Aram takes the life of Geoffrey Lester, he symbolically threatens to replace him, thus usurping the role of his son, Walter, until the latter defends his right as legal and legitimate successor and avenges his father's death exposing Eugene Aram's imposture. Likewise, in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," Charles Goodfellow murders Barnabas Shuttleworthy with the symbolic view of usurping his privileged position as a wealthy patriarch, thus appropriating the part of his nephew, until Goodfellow is publicly illegitimatised, while Pennifeather is eventually sanctioned as Barnabas' legal as well as legitimate inheritor. In both narratives, Walter Lester and Pennifeather internalise their moralising role –

¹⁰ Stuart Levine and Susan F. Levine. "Comic Satires and Grotesques: 1836-1849." (Eric Carlson. Ed. *A Companion to Poe Studies*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996): 139.

thus developing their *superego* – in the absence of their parental figure, as they gain maturity as individuals in their aging process, and legitimise themselves in their role as valid successors of their departed parental figures.

Fictionalising guilt and blame on the literary stage

As already renowned writers at this stage of their life, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe had to face unfavourable reviews and harsh criticism of the literary pieces they had published, particularly those that were categorised as crime fiction and indulged in unsavoury aspects of the human condition. Since both writers felt pressurised to earn a living and envisioned their literary careers as their means to reap some profit, they felt concerned to get to know what the public enjoyed reading so as to please popular demands. Nonetheless, having made themselves a name in the literary scenario, their popularity also brought along disapprobation from some critical sectors that contributed to unleashing the guilt of the authors, as well as their need to justify themselves and their fiction. In the year 1847, Bulwer-Lytton published an extended essay under the title of *A Word to the Public*, which was aimed at defending himself from accusations with respect to his fiction, even though the vehemence that Bulwer-Lytton exhibits throughout his essay seems to respond to a haunting feeling of blame. In his essay, from the beginning, Bulwer-Lytton feels concerned to highlight that many critics have mistaken the acts and opinions of his characters for his own, while, in addition, he justifies his crime fiction appealing to “the fair liberty in the choice of materials, which it is the interest, both of art and the public, to permit to imaginative writers.”¹¹ Nonetheless, in spite of justifying his literary incursion in crime as necessary in tragic fiction, Bulwer-Lytton also imposes himself some restrictions on the liberty of writers, thus stating that:

1stly. We have a right to demand that, whatever interest the author bids us take in the criminal, we should never, by any metaphysical sophistry, be seduced into admiration of the crime [...] 2ndly. The crimes depicted should not be of a nature to lead us through licentious scenes, nor accompanied with descriptions

¹¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Word to the Public*. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1847): 5.

that appeal dangerously to the senses [...] 3rdly. In dealing especially with the coarser and more violent crimes [...] the author is bound to have some object in view, belonging to the purer and more thoughtful principles of art.¹²

Although the initial aim of Bulwer-Lytton's essay *A Word to the Public* was to justify his incursion in crime fiction and defend his novels of crime from the accusations with which they had been charged, judging from his words above, the constraints that he inflicts on himself as an author and on his fiction unveil an undetected wish to censor himself, and thus, to take his share of the blame and acknowledge part of his guilt. In fact, as he refers to the crime novels on behalf of which he has borne strong criticism, Bulwer-Lytton also defends himself from his choice to write his novel *Eugene Aram* and focus his attention on delineating the personality of an actual murderer, although, as will be shown, his fervent justification for having written his novel also betrays some sort of sympathy for its hero on behalf of the author.

In his essay in defence of *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton justifies the choice of its theme, claiming that the portrayal of an apparently blameless scholar that locks a dark crime in his conscience, which is brought to light, cannot be taken as a commonplace criminal case, but precisely owing to its peculiarity, the author considered it particularly suitable for turning it into the object of fiction. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton identified the tragic potential with which an actual character such as Eugene Aram was endowed, inasmuch as he embodies an individual who, in his self-imposed loneliness, must face the shameful and guilty memories of his crime. In this respect, given the appealing nature of the criminal case of Eugene Aram for the domain of fiction, Bulwer-Lytton concedes that other writers had also considered the same subject for their literary purposes, as was the case with his mentor William Godwin and the writer to whom Bulwer-Lytton would eventually dedicate his novel *Eugene Aram*, that is, Walter Scott. Above all, though, Bulwer-Lytton grounds the defence of his novel in his inherent moral purpose, insofar as the author, for the most part sought to demonstrate how the consciousness of the deed committed on behalf of the character deprives him of his humanity and excludes him from socialising with other individuals. In this sense,

¹² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Word to the Public*. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1847): 31-32.

Bulwer-Lytton justifies the ultimate morale of his novel, claiming that the crime depicted was meant to appear as eminently hideous, and thus, his intention as an author was neither to justify the criminal nor atone his terrible crime.

As Nancy Jane Tyson claims, in spite of the heated defence that Bulwer-Lytton made of his novel *Eugene Aram* in his essay *A Word to the Public*, it was only two years later that he finally submitted to the judgement of the critical opinion and published a profusely revised edition of his original novel.¹³ Drawing on his habit of sharing the ultimate purpose of his writings with his readership, in the preface to the 1849 edition of *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton gave account of the major changes and less important alterations that he had introduced in the present edition of his novel. As he had done in his essay *A Word to the Public*, Bulwer-Lytton once more made use of a confessional tone, but this time to inform the reader of the most significant change that he had inserted in his original narrative, in the following terms:

In this edition I have made one alteration, somewhat more important than mere verbal correction. On going, with mature judgement, over all the evidences on which Aram was condemned, I have convinced myself, that though an accomplice in the robbery of Clarke, he was free both from the premeditated design and the actual deed of murder.¹⁴

Bulwer-Lytton thus declared that the major change introduced in the original version of his novel *Eugene Aram* was that he had acquitted its main character of the murder of Daniel Clarke, so that Eugene Aram was no longer a murderer, but rather Richard Houseman's accomplice to robbery. According to Nancy Jane Tyson, as derived from this major change in the plot of his fiction, Bulwer-Lytton had to introduce other minor alterations in the novel, such as dropping the original emphasis on Eugene Aram's utilitarian justification for his crime, expunging the text of whatever might be considered irreligious, and having his character filled with remorse in spite of the fact

¹³ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 105.

¹⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Preface to the Present Edition (1849)." *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): ix.

that he was no longer guilty of murder.¹⁵ Even though critics such as Nancy Jane Tyson claim that Bulwer-Lytton's major change introduced in his novel *Eugene Aram* sanctioned the author's concession to the harsh criticism his novels had received and his deep concern about the public image he projected as an author, his ultimate decision to acquit Eugene Aram of murder may also respond to some other reasons. In fact, no longer characterised as an accomplice to murder, in spite of being portrayed as a tormented individual suffused with guilt and remorse, Eugene Aram is presented as a more admirable character, especially inasmuch as there seems to be less occasion for his introspective manners, as well as a less blatant purpose for examining his conscience. It might be claimed that, rather than succumbing to external pressures and the critical voices raised against his crime fiction at the time, Bulwer-Lytton's decision to make this important change in the portrayal of his character also responded to a personal need to make his readership regard his hero in a more positive light.

A close inspection of Bulwer-Lytton's essay *A Word to the Public* and of his preface to the 1849 edition of his novel *Eugene Aram* shows that the author reiterated himself upon including in both texts an identical description of the character of Eugene Aram and the melodramatic reasons that might have led him to indulge in criminal behaviour and even to commit murder. In spite of the significant changes introduced in the plot of his novel, the author's need to restate his defence for his character eventually unveils his personal sympathy for the hero of his novel, as well as his partial identification with some of the exaggerated circumstances befalling the character that he might have also had to face partially at this stage of his life. In this respect, this passage reads as follows:

The crime came upon him in the partial insanity, produced by the combining circumstances of a brain overwrought by intense study, disturbed by an excited imagination, and the fumes of a momentary disease of the reasoning faculty, consumed by the desire of knowledge, unwholesome and morbid, because coveted as an end, not a means, added to the other physical causes of mental aberration – to be found in loneliness, and want verging upon famine.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 108.

¹⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Word to the Public*. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1847): 38-39.

Some of the personal circumstances that Eugene Aram goes through in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, such as his isolation, his lack of economic means, his intense devotion to study, and his unbridled imagination were conditions that the author himself might have also felt identified with in this period. To stretch further this analogy between author and character, in a metaphorical way, Bulwer-Lytton thus succumbed to crime in his literary endeavours and he did it mostly for money, as he felt the need to write in order to make ends meet at this stage. Hence, the zealous defence of his fictional character, and by extension, of the portrayal of crime as a tragic motive in his fiction responded to personal reasons as, to a certain extent, Bulwer-Lytton had envisioned his Faustian hero, Eugene Aram, as an overstated embodiment of himself as trapped in an exaggerated portrayal of the overwhelming circumstances that were befalling him at the time. Likewise, his final concession to external pressures and his ultimate change of the crime for which Eugene Aram is to blame in the novel respond to Bulwer-Lytton's personal guilt in front of accusations and his ultimate need for atonement. While living in London, Bulwer-Lytton was in desperate need for seclusion in order to write crime fiction in order to make a living, and given his deep concern for his public status as a politician as well as a highly-acclaimed writer, he might have perceived his antisocial and impudent conduct as a metaphorical crime for which he was to blame and had to be exonerated in the fiction he was writing at the time. Accordingly, it could be argued that his ardent defence for his crime fiction underscored more profound aspects than it appeared to at first sight.

In an early essay entitled "On Art in Fiction," which he published in 1838 – that is, almost ten years before *A Word to the Public* – Bulwer-Lytton already defended that "true art never disgusts,"¹⁷ and it was in this context that he preferred the use of 'terror,' in contrast with 'horror,' and regarded it as the true tragic emotion, thus arguing that 'terror' comes from the mind and appeals to our spiritual nature, while 'horror' comes from the body and addresses our basest instincts. This essay pertaining to the genre of

¹⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "On Art in Fiction." (*Pamphlets and Sketches*. London: Routledge, 1875): 339. This essay originally appeared in two instalments in *The Monthly Chronicle* of March and April 1838.

literary theory not only evinces that Bulwer-Lytton was a highly self-conscious writer at a significantly early stage of his literary career, but it also shows that at the time Bulwer-Lytton already felt concerned to defend the inclusion of elements related to crime fiction – and even gothic fiction – in his narratives, even quite a few years prior to the publication of his fervent defence in *A Word to the Public*. Bulwer-Lytton shared his condition of self-awareness as a writer and of deep reflection upon his art with Poe, insofar as the American writer also published a series of essays in which he examined his views on critical theory, as is the case with “The Rationale of Verse” (1843), “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), and “The Poetic Principle” (1848). However, it was in an earlier essay – in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* (1842) – that Poe shared his opinion about writing prose, and particularly, in analogy with Bulwer-Lytton, he also felt concerned to justify the kind of tales that he wrote and defend himself as an author against the harsh accusations that he had to bear:

It will be seen how full of prejudice are the usual animadversions against those *tales of effect* many fine examples of which were found in the earlier numbers of *Blackwood*. The impressions produced were wrought in a legitimate sphere of action, and constituted a legitimate although sometimes an exaggerated interest. They were relished by every man of genius: although there were found many men of genius who condemned them without just ground. The true critic will but demand that the design intended be accomplished, to the fullest extent, by the means most advantageously applicable.¹⁸

Judging from his words, Poe estimated that a tale should only be judged on the grounds of whether it achieved the effect that it was initially aimed at, thus considering that what he termed as ‘tales of effect’ were entirely legitimate within the domain of fiction, in spite of the fact that, in his view, they had often been unjustly condemned by men of genius. Nonetheless, Poe’s main interest in defending the sort of fiction that he would often write also responded to an increasing self-awareness about his public status as an author. Poe thus aimed to reconstruct and even upgrade his social image in an attempt to become a distinguished member within his contemporary literary circles, and it was with that purpose in mind that he worked hard to improve his reputation and the public

¹⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. “Review of *Twice-Told Tales*.” (*Graham’s Magazine*. May 1842): 299.

image that he projected. However, as will be shown, his frustration for failing to make an illustrious name for himself within the literary circles, together with his disappointment at not finding a publisher in Great Britain, in spite of his efforts and his request addressed to Charles Dickens, would pave the ground for his writing the satirical, detective tale “Thou Art the Man.”

In this respect, it was at this stage that Poe spread invented facts about his social status, thus forging his own autobiography and transforming a past of emotional frustration into a comprehensive account of social distinction. As a matter of fact, in 1843, a biographical account of Poe was published in the journal *Saturday Museum of Philadelphia*,¹⁹ which contributed to granting Poe an alluring social and almost aristocratic background, since, even if it placed emphasis on some biographical details that were genuine, the profile it presented was, for the most part, inflated with altered and invented facts. Although this biographical sketch was publicly attributed to Henry Beck Hirst, biographer Kenneth Silverman takes for granted that it was Poe himself who provided Hirst with this biographical material, thus acknowledging that Poe played an important part in forging his public status as a writer at the time. As Kenneth Silverman further notices, Poe’s biographical account published in the *Saturday Museum* underlined the author’s distinguished origins, claiming that he descended from one of the oldest and most respectable families in Baltimore, and declaring that Poe’s origins improved through his marriage to Virginia Clemm, as he then became connected with some of the best families in Maryland.²⁰ For the most part, though, in his biographical sketch, Poe appeared mostly concerned to highlight his close association with Great Britain, well aware that many of the most eminent writers at the time in America were British in origin and even descended from illustrious European lineages. In this respect, as Kenneth Silverman recounts, Poe’s biographical outline emphasised that his maternal family became renowned in British naval history and was connected with illustrious

¹⁹ Henry Beck Hirst. “Edgar Allan Poe.” *Saturday Museum* (1843): 1, col. 1. Poe’s biographical account was published in Philadelphia on 25th February 1843. Poe attributed this account to Henry Beck Hirst, even though biographer Kenneth Silverman claims that Poe himself was its author.

²⁰ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 196-197.

families from Great Britain, while he had been educated in England and Scotland, and had travelled widely across Europe in an attempt to emulate his much-admired Lord Byron.²¹

In his purpose to grant himself a notable public status as a writer, not only did he wish to stress his British origins, but Poe also sought to distinguish himself by making himself a name on the other shore of the Atlantic, well aware that many judged the success of an American author according to his reception in Great Britain. As Kenneth Silverman claims, up to the year 1840 only Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), together with four of his tales, had been reprinted in Great Britain,²² and he hoped to have some more of his literary works published in Europe in order to consolidate his career as a distinguished writer. Upon knowing that his much-admired English writer, Charles Dickens – whose works Poe had reviewed on a number of occasions²³ – was on an American tour in 1842 and expected to visit Philadelphia, Poe tried to resort to his help to obtain a publisher for his tales in London and become the American correspondent for the London *Daily News*, and with that aim in mind, he conducted two interviews with Dickens at the United States Hotel in Philadelphia in March 1842.²⁴ Complying with Poe's requests, Dickens promised that he would try to obtain a publisher for his short-stories when he got back to England. Nonetheless, Poe's hopes were soon shattered, since, instead of receiving confirmation of the acceptance of his tales for publication – as he had expected – he merely ended up with a letter in which Dickens informed him about his failure to fulfil Poe's request in the following terms:

²¹ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 196-197.

²² Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 198.

²³ Poe published reviews of some of Charles Dickens' novels such as *Watkins Tottle*, and *Other Sketches Illustrative of Everyday Life and Everyday People* in 1836; *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* in 1839; *The Old Curiosity Shop and Other Tales* in 1841, *Master Humphrey's Clock* in 1841; and, *Barnaby Rudge* in 1842. Poe also published a notice on *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in 1836.

²⁴ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 69.

I am, however, unable to report any success. I have mentioned it to publishers with whom I have influence, but they have, one and all, declined the venture. And the only consolation I can give you is that I do not believe any collection of detached pieces by an unknown writer, even though he were an Englishman, would be at all likely to find a publisher in this metropolis just now.²⁵

According to Dawn Sova, this failure on behalf of Dickens led to a feeling of bitterness on Poe's part,²⁶ which would mark the transition between Poe's initial admiration for the English writer and his ultimate resentment against him. In fact, what would contribute to increasing Poe's choleric temper at the time were his suspicions that Dickens might have played him unfair. In 1844 – that is, in the same year that Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" came to light – the London *Foreign Quarterly Review* published an anonymous report concerning American poetry, which condemned many American poets, and in particular, regarded Poe as a poet mostly after the manner of Alfred Lord Tennyson.²⁷ According to Kenneth Silverman, on reading this review, Poe immediately identified Dickens as the author of the text, since he felt that it bore many echoes of the conversations that he remembered having with Dickens in Philadelphia two years before.²⁸ Although his suspicions were never fully confirmed, the fact of reading the assertion that he was a mere imitator in a review published in England led Poe to feel utterly disappointed with regard to his formerly-highly-admired writer, Charles Dickens.²⁹

Having been published in November 1844 – that is almost ten months after the anonymous text in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* – Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" can be interpreted as an allegory of the literary battle of influences and interests that was taking place at the time within the literary circles, as, for the most part, it is filled with

²⁵ Charles Dickens. "Letter from Charles Dickens to Edgar Allan Poe." 27th November 1842. See *Poe's Letters* on the *Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. <www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4211270.htm>

²⁶ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 69.

²⁷ Anonymous. "American Poetry." (*The Foreign Quarterly Review* 32. January 1844): 291-324.

²⁸ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 276.

²⁹ In spite of his resentment against Dickens for having failed to help him in his professional endeavours, Poe insisted on his determination to publish in England, and to that end, he also approached the English poet Richard Henry Horne. See Kenneth Silverman's *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991): 200.

veiled literary references. Poe was struggling to make himself a niche in the literary panorama, but his name was often obliterated by highly-respectable and consolidated authors such as Charles Dickens and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who overshadowed Poe's emerging recognition. In fact, in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," the intertextuality goes as far as to make direct allusion to Dickens, and significantly, to Bulwer-Lytton, as, in the course of his detective investigations, the narrator of the tale takes into consideration a series of crime novels in order to unravel the puzzle. In this respect, in the tale, the narrator claims that "in all the crack novels, I say, from those of Bulwer and Dickens to those of Turnapenny and Ainsworth,"³⁰ the identity of the criminal often lies in the subject who mostly benefits from the crime. By means of this explicit and ironic intertextual reference, Poe is acknowledging the influence that these authors exerted on him. However, taking into account that, in the tale, it is unveiled that the murderer of Barnabas Shuttleworthy is not precisely the man that mostly benefits economically from his death, Poe shows his concern to emphasise how different his fiction is from that of the authors that he explicitly refers to.

It is in this respect that Poe's satirical, detective story "Thou Art the Man" can be interpreted as a *roman à clef* – that is, a narrative about real life disguised as fiction – inasmuch as it is possible to identify some actual authors behind the names of the main characters of the tale. In fact, the name of the victim, Barnabas Shuttleworthy, immediately brings to mind the character after which Dickens' novel was entitled, *Barnaby Rudge*. However, Poe once more made use of irony in choosing a name for a character, since, Barnabas Shuttleworthy is characterised as "one of the wealthiest and most respectable citizens of the borough,"³¹ while the character that gives Dickens' novel its name is a tramp who has a raven as a pet. Likewise, the apparently compliant, but truly wicked and ironically-named, character of Charles Goodfellow in Poe's tale is also clearly remindful of reputed authors such as Charles Dickens – insofar as his first

³⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. "Thou Art the Man." (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1051.

³¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Thou Art the Man." (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1044.

name is concerned – and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow – in clear reference to his surname. The narrator’s ironic views on the character of Charles Goodfellow in Poe’s tale – and by extension, Poe’s changing opinion about Charles Dickens at this stage of his career – are illustrated through the narrator’s emphasis on the first name of this character:

Now, whether it is a marvellous coincidence, or whether it is that the name itself has an imperceptible effect upon the character, I have never yet been able to ascertain; but the fact is unquestionable, that there never yet was any person named Charles who was not an open, manly, honest, good-natured, and frank-hearted fellow, with a rich, clear voice, that did you good to hear it, and an eye that looked you always straight in the face, as much as to say, ‘I have a clear conscience myself; am afraid of no man, and am altogether above doing a mean action.’ And thus all the hearty, careless, ‘walking gentlemen’ of the stage are very certain to be called Charles.³²

The narrator’s sarcastic, and even reprobating, views on the first name of Charles Goodfellow echoes Poe’s resentment towards Charles Dickens at the time. Besides, the young character of Pennifeather – who, owing to his dissipated habits, is immediately accused of the murder of his uncle, Barnabas – seems to make allusion to Poe himself, inasmuch as he is unfairly judged throughout the story and his fictional surname indirectly refers to Poe’s projected literary journal, *The Penn Magazine*.

Moreover, some scenes of Poe’s tale “Thou Art the Man” also present an acute resemblance with Poe’s meeting with Charles Dickens, the great expectations that Poe had to publish in England at the time, and the ultimate adverse outcome of his prospects. Inasmuch as the name of the victim in Poe’s tale, Barnabas Shuttleworthy, is a veiled reference to Dickens’ novel *Barnaby Rudge*, and insofar as this was the novel that Poe and Dickens discussed in the course of their conversation in Philadelphia, it can be argued that the death of Barnabas Shuttleworthy in Poe’s tale involves the author’s realisation that his prospects to publish in England and become a distinguished author had vanished. Likewise, the passage in Poe’s tale in which Charles Goodfellow –

³² Edgar Allan Poe. “Thou Art the Man.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1044-1045.

inasmuch as his name is remindful of Charles Dickens – continually bemoans that, on account of the disappearance of Barnabas Shuttleworthy, he will never receive the shipment of bottles of *Château Margaux* that his friend had promised is evocative of Charles Dickens' expectations to receive confirmation from different publishers that Poe's works could be printed in England, in the hope of complying with the request that Poe had bestowed upon the English writer. Nonetheless, on learning that Dickens was not successful in receiving the good news that Poe had so much awaited, and especially on suspecting that Dickens had deceived him, Poe's counterpart in the story – the narrator and detective – sends Charles Goodfellow a box, which, instead of containing the bottles of wine that he has been expecting, actually conceals the corpse of Barnabas Shuttleworthy. Accordingly, drawing on this interpretation of Poe's tale as suggestive of the literary battle in which the author was taking part, the fact that the narrator of the story publicly accuses Charles Goodfellow of the murder of Barnabas Shuttleworthy, and thus, exonerates Pennifeather, who has been charged with the murder of his uncle, underlines Poe's fictionalised portrayal of having been played unfair. The death of Barnabas Shuttleworthy in the tale underscores Poe's shattered prospects of becoming a highly-reputed writer, while the narrator considers Charles Goodfellow responsible for this death, in analogy with Poe, who held Dickens accountable for having denied him the fame that he thought he deserved as a writer. Hence, it is not as a result of Pennifeather's dissolute habits that Barnabas Shuttleworthy dies – just as it is not owing to Poe's fault that his prospects to publish in England came to no avail – but, in the narrator's view, and by extension, from Poe's perspective, it is due to Charles Goodfellow's deeds that Barnabas meets his death. In Poe's tale, the demise of Barnabas symbolises the end of Poe's alluring prospects, as he believed that the unfavourable review published in the press, which he attributed to Dickens' authorship, had diminished his expectations to become an illustrious writer on the other shore of the Atlantic.

From a personal perspective, Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" turns into a vindictive defence for his name as a writer, inasmuch as it responds his having been categorised as a mere imitator in a review published in the press which he would always

attribute to Charles Dickens. Having envisioned the English writer as his mentor in Great Britain, Poe felt that he had been deceived by Dickens' promises, and his tale "Thou Art the Man" is aimed at exposing the truth, laying the blame on the prejudices and snobbism of highly-reputed writers that looked down on emerging authors, and asserting that, like Pennifeather in his tale, he was not responsible for the wrong – that of being an imitator – of which he had been accused publicly in what he considered an infamous review. If Poe's tale was aimed at defending himself from libels in this literary scenario as previously shown, even if Bulwer-Lytton's novel, *Eugene Aram*, responds to the author's need to defend his right to isolate himself from the world in order to give vent to his solitary literary endeavours, it mostly exposes Bulwer-Lytton's guilty feelings as a writer and his need for expiation. By means of envisioning his hero Eugene Aram, Bulwer-Lytton held on to his right to indulge in crime fiction – which he had begun with the publication of his novel *Paul Clifford* – sticking to his firm belief that criminality was a legitimate subject for literature and also paid well, as the increasing sales of his novels considerably showed. It is in this sense that, figuratively, Bulwer-Lytton felt sympathy for his fictional criminal and, in a symbolic way, he even emulated the criminal behaviour of his character Eugene Aram, inasmuch as, in the novel, the hero commits a crime because he perceives it as legitimate and even defensible, given his penurious circumstances at that point of his life, which he shared to a certain extent with those of his author. Likewise, if Bulwer-Lytton felt guilty upon facing the accusations of succumbing to crime as a writer and felt the need to defend himself in his essay *A Word to the Public*, his hero also notices this change in perspective, as in later editions of the novel, Eugene Aram modifies his wicked nature to the extent of transforming from a murderer into a mere accomplice of robbery, while he is also presented as the victim of remorse and is even depicted as a more tormented man than in previous editions of the novel. The transformation befalling Eugene Aram as Bulwer-Lytton considered modifying the character's portrayal reveals the author's own guilty feelings and his ultimate surrender to the public vilification of his character – and by extension, of his public persona as a distinguished writer – on behalf of some critics. Nonetheless, what remains unchanged through all the versions of Bulwer-

Lytton's novel is that Eugene Aram is eventually declared guilty and is eventually condemned to capital punishment by hanging. It is in this respect that it can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton's novel is a narrative of blame, confession, and expiation, since, upon punishing his character for indulging in crime, the author is also metaphorically punishing himself with the object of finding some redemption as a writer of crime fiction.

After the trace of the scholar-criminal: the case of Eugene Aram

As Nancy Jane Tyson contends, the actual case of Eugene Aram seemed to have appealed significantly to the Victorian literary imagination,³³ particularly inasmuch as the discovery that an apparently quiet scholar had been responsible for an atrocious murder was beyond any human understanding, since such an act of violence appeared to be at odds with his peaceful nature and intellectual turn of mind. It might be owing to the traditional dichotomy between public and private spheres within the Victorian mindset, which the figure of Eugene Aram seemed to typify, that this criminal case became particularly popular and attracted the imagination of a series of writers in Victorian times. Nonetheless, given his intrinsically defiant and rebellious personality, the character of Eugene Aram also complied with many tenets pertaining to the Romantic archetype, insofar as he is regarded as a highly-intellectually-gifted individual who rejects established norms and conventions, and places his Faustian and Promethean aspirations at the centre of his existence. As Keith Hollingsworth notices, Thomas Hood wrote the tragic poem "The Dream of Eugene Aram," which was published in the annual *The Gem* in 1829 and shows Eugene Aram, working as usher at a school, who tells a boy that he has dreamt about a horrible crime, when an officer comes to arrest him, and he discovers that the crime of his dream is actually his own.³⁴ The ultimate tragic quality of the character of Eugene Aram acquired immediate popularity among the readership at the time, and owing to this unprecedented celebrity, Thomas Hood's

³³ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 4.

³⁴ Keith Hollingsworth. *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens, and Thackeray*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963): 84.

poem was reprinted and republished, and popularised the story of Eugene Aram, which became a haunting story for the contemporary readership. In addition to its popular appeal as a Romantic hero in the different fictionalisations derived from the real character at the time, for both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, the actual figure of the scholar-criminal, Eugene Aram, would play a pivotal role not only in fuelling their imagination as writers, but in a personal way, since, as will be shown, the real person on whom the literary character of Eugene Aram was based was also closely connected with both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe.

In a period in which Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled to write in order to make a living, he became particularly skilled at identifying the likings of his readership so as to select the subject matter of his literary works, and, given the popularity that the story of Eugene Aram had acquired at the time, he identified it as a potential choice for one of his novels. In this respect, biographer Michael Sadleir notices Bulwer-Lytton's opportunism in the choice of his themes, as well as his instinct in prejudging popular taste³⁵ at a time when he needed that his novels sold well as he depended economically on himself. With the aim of gathering information in order to write his next novel, Bulwer-Lytton subjected himself to overwhelming literary drudgery and thoroughly researched into the criminal case of Eugene Aram, thus finding himself emulating the solipsistic conduct of the hero of his novel, and even the detective work of another central character, Walter Lester, who, in pursuit of his father, learns about Eugene Aram's dark secret and unmask his actual identity. In spite of some variations that Bulwer-Lytton introduced in the original criminal case in order to make the story more appealing to audiences, Bulwer-Lytton's novel was, for the most part, based on the actual character of Eugene Aram and was initially aimed at providing a criminological profile of an apparently genteel murderer. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's exhaustive research into the criminal case of Eugene Aram brings to mind Poe's own endeavours to unravel the actual murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers in New York, eventually introducing several variations in his fictional portrayal of the original criminal case, which gave rise

³⁵ Michael Sadleir. *Bulwer: A Panorama*. (London: Constable, 1931): 275.

to his tale “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1843) and is considered the first detective story to attempt to solve an actual crime.³⁶

As Keith Hollingsworth claims, Bulwer-Lytton must have first read about the criminal case of Eugene Aram in the *Newgate Calendar* bulletins of the time,³⁷ when he was in preparation of his first crime novel, *Paul Clifford*.³⁸ The original criminal case into which Bulwer-Lytton began to do extended research at the time involved the English philologist, Eugene Aram, who was born of a humble family in Yorkshire. Even though he worked as a clerk in a counting house in London for some time, Eugene Aram became best-known for his job as schoolmaster for most of his life. He mastered several classical languages such as Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, and given his expertise in the field, he even projected writing an etymology comparing classical and Celtic languages. For ten years, he remained a schoolmaster in Knaresborough until, following some strange circumstances, he settled in London on his own, even leaving his family behind. In the year 1744, an intimate friend of Eugene Aram, Daniel Clark, disappeared after obtaining an important amount of goods from the tradesmen in town. Even though Eugene Aram was suspected of having been involved in the disappearance of Clark, no evidence was found to charge him with any crime. It was not until the year 1758 – when some bones were found at Saint Robert’s Cave in Knaresborough and were alleged to be those of Clark – that suspicions fell upon Eugene Aram once more. Owing to the fact that the deserted wife of the schoolmaster had hinted that her husband and a man named Richard Houseman were involved in the case, Houseman was arrested and, when confronted with the bones found in the cave, he confessed the place where Clark’s body had been actually buried and also implicated Aram in the crime. As a result of Houseman’s declaration, Aram was arrested and sent to York for trial, where he conducted his own defence and endeavoured to overthrow Houseman’s evidence.

³⁶ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 164.

³⁷ The *Newgate Calendar*, subtitled *The Malefactor’s Bloody Register*, was a monthly bulletin of executions produced by the Keeper of the Newgate Prison in London, and was considered improving literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

³⁸ Keith Hollingsworth. *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens, and Thackeray*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963): 83.

Nonetheless, Eugene Aram was finally found guilty of the murder of Daniel Clark and was condemned to be executed, even though, after confessing his guilt in his cell and shedding light on the true purpose of his crime – the discovery of the affair of his wife with Clark – he made an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide only to be hanged some days later in the year 1759.

Upon writing his novel *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton was faced with all this material pertaining to the original criminal case of a scholar who ended up becoming a murderer. Nonetheless, although he knew that this original case had much potential for a novel, Bulwer-Lytton was also well aware that he needed to alter the original story to make the case more appealing to his Victorian readers and transform it from a criminal case into a literary fiction of crime. First of all, Bulwer-Lytton altered the personality of his hero, as, instead of being a schoolmaster as was the case of the original character, the literary Eugene Aram was turned into a gloomy scholar, mostly interested in the sciences of botany and astronomy, and thus, closely associated with nature and concerned with unravelling the secrets of the universe. Given his Faustian temperament, the character of Eugene Aram in Bulwer-Lytton's novel was mostly characterised as a lonely scholar, who enjoys his seclusion and detachment from the outside world, and therefore, in contrast with the original character of the criminal case, the literary hero is deprived of a wife and of a family of his own. In this respect, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the ultimate motive that leads Eugene Aram to murder is precisely to rob his victim of the money that will allow him to devote his entire existence to the pursuit of knowledge, thus unveiling that his moral crime lies in regarding wisdom as an end in itself instead of a means. Hence, the motivation of the murderer in the original criminal case – which responded to taking revenge for the unfaithfulness of Daniel Clark with his wife – was entirely removed from Bulwer-Lytton's narrative.

Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton made sure that his literary Eugene Aram presented some traits that would make him sympathetic to his readership, and to that end, the author decided to introduce a romantic story in the plot of his novel, when Eugene Aram's neighbour, the kind-hearted Madeline Lester, befriends him and falls in love with him, while not only does the hero correspond with her, but he also becomes a close

friend of the Lester family. Similarly, although in the original criminal case Eugene Aram was a friend of his victim, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the man that the literary hero slays – Daniel Clarke – is presented as a despicable and depraved character, who is even found guilty of abusing innocent girls, so that, even if Eugene Aram's crime would still be considered unlawful from a criminal perspective, his deed would not be regarded as so highly objectionable on behalf of the audience.

Knowing the intricacies of literary fiction in depth, Bulwer-Lytton also felt the need to create an antagonist to his hero, and with that aim in mind, he devised a parallel plot involving Walter Lester, who competes with Aram for the love of his cousin Madeline and initiates a desperate quest to find his stranded father. Bulwer-Lytton characterised Walter Lester as an amateurish detective, who, not only discovers that the murdered Daniel Clarke was actually his father, but, through a twist in the plot, he also finds out that Eugene Aram is responsible for his death. In this respect, Walter Lester eventually takes over the role of hero from Eugene Aram, and even though he cannot marry Madeline as she perishes out of grief upon discovering Eugene Aram's real nature, Walter Lester marries Madeline's sister, Ellinor, thus being heralded as the moral hero that the novel initially lacked. Finally, if in the original criminal case Eugene Aram attempted to commit suicide before his execution but he failed and was eventually killed by hanging, in his novel, Bulwer-Lytton wanted to endow the tragic figure of his Faustian hero, Eugene Aram, with some ultimate magnificence, and to that end, he allows him to take his own life in his cell before he is publicly executed, thus defending his own version of Eugene Aram as an eminently Romantic hero rather than as a criminal.

Even if in his novel Bulwer-Lytton introduced significant alterations in the portrayal of Eugene Aram in comparison with the original character which he had examined in the course of his research, at the same time that he wrote the novel, as James Campbell claims, Bulwer-Lytton also worked on a dramatic sketch about Eugene Aram that appeared to be more faithful to the original criminal case from which Bulwer-

Lytton drew his character.³⁹ The way Eugene Aram is presented in Bulwer-Lytton's play significantly differs from the more sympathetic portrayal given in the novel, since, as Campbell further suggests, in the dramatic sketch, Eugene Aram's crime is regarded as the premeditated deed of a criminal acting in cold blood.⁴⁰ Bulwer-Lytton's simultaneous writing of a play and a novel focused on the character of Eugene Aram, and particularly, the significantly different portrayal of the character that he gave in each of these literary works, evince the two-fold attitude that he adopted with respect to his fictional character. Although Bulwer-Lytton was well aware that Eugene Aram was a criminal and had been tried and justly punished for having committed a murder, as his play mostly exposes, it seems that, through the course of exploring and gaining insight into the psychology of the criminal in order to write his novel, Bulwer-Lytton could not avoid romanticising and even identifying with some traits of his hero, which would eventually involve some cause for personal and moral concern. As will be shown, years after the publication of his novel *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton would even feel the need to justify himself for having chosen a criminal as the hero of his novel, and to that end, he felt compelled to defend the legitimacy of his choice in the prefaces to the subsequent editions of the novel and a series of essays of critical theory that were published in the press.

Nevertheless, in addition to his initial choice of a popular theme as was the case of Eugene Aram with the aim of appealing to the readership, it seems that there was more than met the eye in Bulwer-Lytton's interest in the psychological profile of a character such as Eugene Aram. The personal circumstances that surrounded Bulwer-Lytton at the time of writing his novel led him to feel identified with some qualities pertaining to his hero, while the portrayal that Bulwer-Lytton made of Eugene Aram necessarily imbibed the personal situation befalling the author at the time, thus revealing that the reasons why Bulwer-Lytton romanticised his hero in his novel not only responded to the purpose of turning him into a sympathetic character to the audience. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to share a series of qualities with his criminal

³⁹ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 45.

⁴⁰ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 45.

hero, such as the fact that, having been deprived of his allowance, he felt compelled to work earnestly and devote his entire time to writing in an utter state of isolation and reclusion that gradually drew him to become estranged from his friends and relatives. According to Nancy Jane Tyson, the tremendous pressure under which Bulwer-Lytton laboured during the composition of *Eugene Aram* led him to physical debilitation,⁴¹ while biographer Michael Sadler claims that this novel was “an obvious product of over-wrought nerves.”⁴² Hence, the personal turmoil that Bulwer-Lytton was undergoing at the time contributed to giving shape to the tormented nature that characterises his hero, while the burden of bringing his novel to an end in a considerably short span of time and the dilemma of giving literary birth to a criminal in his novel also exerted a negative effect on Bulwer-Lytton’s health. In this respect, Nancy Jane Tyson even goes as far as to sustain that Bulwer-Lytton’s fretted nerves at the time, together with his obsessive habit of writing, eventually planted the seeds that would give way to the collapse of his marriage in the following years.⁴³

In addition to reflecting the troublesome situation that Bulwer-Lytton was personally going through, which led him to feel somehow identified with his fictional character, the figure of Eugene Aram also fascinated its author because, in the course of his research to prepare his novel, Bulwer-Lytton discovered that the actual person on whom his character was based had been personally connected with his family. Even though, at first sight, in his role as a scholar, the character of Eugene Aram is somehow remindful of Bulwer-Lytton’s maternal grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton, as he devoted his life to study, Bulwer-Lytton found out that the real Eugene Aram had been associated with his paternal family. As Victor Lytton – Bulwer-Lytton’s grandson – notices in one of the biographies on Bulwer-Lytton, the character of Eugene Aram had a special interest for Bulwer-Lytton, inasmuch as the scholar had been a friend of his paternal grandfather, and had also been employed as a tutor to his family at Heydon

⁴¹ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 66.

⁴² Michael Sadler. *Bulwer: A Panorama*. (London: Constable, 1931): 270.

⁴³ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 66.

Hall.⁴⁴ Before the publication of his novel *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton discovered that his paternal grandfather “Justice” Bulwer – as he was commonly known – had hired a scholar to instruct his daughters during their holidays, and to his utter astonishment, Bulwer-Lytton eventually found out that the private tutor of his paternal aunts had been the infamous Eugene Aram, whose name had acquired popularity in the society of the time for being an illustrious scholar who had been charged with murder. It was in the preface to the 1840 edition of his novel *Eugene Aram* that Bulwer-Lytton unveiled how he had learned about the close connection between the real Eugene Aram and his paternal family:

The strange history of Eugene Aram had excited my interest and wonder long before the present work was composed or conceived. It so happened, that during Aram’s residence at Lynn, his reputation for learning had attracted the notice of my grandfather [...]. Aram frequently visited at Heydon (my grandfather’s house), and gave lessons, probably in no very elevated branches of erudition, to the younger members of the family. This I chanced to hear when I was on a visit in Norfolk, some two years before this novel was published.⁴⁵

Bulwer-Lytton’s surprising discovery about the connection established between Eugene Aram and his family already unleashed the author’s imagination at the time and granted the author the original basis that would eventually give rise to his novel about this scholar-criminal. In fact, precisely, drawing on this association between Eugene Aram and Bulwer-Lytton’s paternal family, Nancy Jane Tyson argues that the Lester family in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel was possibly related in the author’s mind to his ancestors, the Bulwers of Heydon Hall, inasmuch as Rowland Lester is remindful of “Justice” Bulwer, while Squire Lester’s daughters in the fiction, Madeline and Ellinor, parallel Bulwer-Lytton’s two aunts whom Eugene Aram tutored at Heydon.⁴⁶ In this respect, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton’s fantasising about a romantic affair between one of his

⁴⁴ The Earl of Lytton, K.G. (Victor Lytton). *Bulwer-Lytton*. (London: Home and Van Thal, 1948): 47.

⁴⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Preface to the Edition of 1840.” *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): v.

⁴⁶ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 77.

aunts and the scholar Eugene Aram provided him with a romantic plot that would contribute to undermining the dramatic tension of many scenes in his novel.

If Bulwer-Lytton made the discovery that the scholar Eugene Aram had been connected with his paternal family, insofar as he had worked as the private tutor of his aunts at Heydon Hall, for Poe, the real figure of Eugene Aram would also bring to mind memories of the two years that the American writer spent at the Manor House School of Stoke Newington in England from 1818 to 1820. In fact, the scholar Eugene Aram had lectured in the same Manor House School where Poe would become a student only a few years later under the principal Reverend John Bransby. As evidence of this, the critic Alpheus Sherwin Cody describes this school where Poe had studied as a child, explicitly stating that “in the corners were what might be called boxes, where sat the masters – one of them Eugene Aram, the criminal made famous in one of Bulwer’s romances.”⁴⁷ Owing to the recent popularity that the case attracted at the time, Poe was likely to have heard about the criminal deeds of such a notorious schoolmaster, and being still a child studying at the same school where Eugene Aram had been teaching, Poe was bound to be haunted by the place, as well as by the reminiscences of a highly-intellectually-gifted schoolmaster who had also been capable of the vilest crime. As happened to Bulwer-Lytton, the close connection between a familiar place and the figure of the scholar-criminal Eugene Aram was also bound to unleash Poe’s imagination, in particular at such an impressionable young age. In this respect, as is well-known, his life as a student at Stoke Newington produced a profound impression on young Poe to the extent that he would transpose the memories of his experience in this school in England in his short story “William Wilson” (1839), which consists of a personal account of the dual existence that an individual leads through the recurrent figure of his double, in clear resemblance with the sort of life that the scholar Eugene Aram actually had, as he appeared to be a respectable schoolmaster in broad daylight, but concealed a dark secret that actually forced him to lead a secret life. The description of the rooms at Stoke Newington that Poe provides in his short piece “William Wilson”

⁴⁷ Alpheus Sherwin Cody. *Four Famous American Writers: Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, James Russell Lowell, Bayard Taylor – A Book for Young Americans*. (New York: Werner School Book Company, 1899): 81.

present a strong parallelism with the depiction provided by Sherwin Cody of the same place, especially the boxes where the schoolmasters sat, which was also the place that Eugene Aram was bound to have occupied during his stay at the school. As a matter of fact, Poe's faithful description of the place in his tale "William Wilson" is also clearly intertwined with his fantasies about the traces of previous occupants, as the following quotation demonstrates:

In other angles were two other similar boxes, far less revered, indeed, but still greatly matters of awe. One of these was the pulpit of the 'classical' usher, one of the 'English and mathematical.' Interspersed about the room, crossing and re-crossing in endless irregularity, were innumerable benches and desks, black, ancient, and time-worn, piled desperately with much-bethumbed books, and so bespattered with initial letters, names at full length, grotesque figures, and other multiplied efforts of the knife, as to have entirely lost what little of original form might have been their portion in days long departed.⁴⁸

Poe's explicit allusion to the blurred initials of names carved on the school desks, and by extension, to the former occupants of the classrooms at the school, including the usher, which precisely had been Eugene Aram's occupation in many of the schools where he had worked, can be interpreted as veiled references to the haunting figure of the scholar-criminal that had been teaching at the school where Poe was studying.

If Poe envisaged the scholastic environment where he spent the years of his childhood as an ultimate gothic scenario in his tale "William Wilson," scarcely five years later, Poe would write his comic detective tale "Thou Art the Man," which can be interpreted as an allegory of the scholarly and literary battle in which the author was taking part at the time against a series of highly-acclaimed writers, who, as fictionally transposed in Poe's tale, also appeared to play the role of the scholar-criminal, in resemblance with the figure of Eugene Aram. In this respect, Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" turns into a detective tale in which characters refer back to actual scholarly men contemporary to its author, and underlines Poe's anxiety as a result of his increasing insight into his public status as a literary man at this stage of his career.

⁴⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "William Wilson." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 430.

Inside the criminal's mind: the fallacy of the superior man

Given their customary inclusion within the genre of crime fiction, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" feature characters playing archetypal roles within this category of fiction, such as that of the criminal and the detective respectively, although each of these two narratives focalises on one of these characters, and thus, apparently takes sides with only one of these conventionally-opposing figures. Even though, as a realist novel, the action in Bulwer-Lytton's text is mediated through an omniscient narrator, it is clearly focalised on the character that gives name to the novel, Eugene Aram, who, for the most part, plays the role of the hero, even if, when an apparently secondary character, Walter Lester, turns into an amateurish detective and unravels Eugene Aram's real identity, it is eventually unveiled that the hero of the novel has also been playing the part of the antagonist. Conversely, the action in Poe's tale develops through an extradiegetic narrator that tells the story from a sarcastic and detached perspective, and while he is not a character that plays an active role in the tale, he turns into its detective, as he manages to solve the case and incriminate Charles Goodfellow to the astonishment of the rest of the characters. Throughout Poe's series of tales within crime fiction, an intradiegetic narrator adopts the perspective of either the criminal or the detective in each story, since, in fact, in narratives such as "Berenice" (1835), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845), and "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), the first-person narrator adopts the perspective of the criminal, while, by contrast, in the tales pertaining to the Auguste Dupin detective trilogy – that is, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1843), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844) – the narrator plays the role of the friend and partner of the detective Auguste Dupin, while in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," the story is directly told from the perspective of the detective. In any case, in Poe's tales, the narrator adopts a differentiated role in each story, providing a first-person account of the facts narrated and presenting a testimony on behalf of either the criminal or the detective, which is conferred to the reader as the subjective perspective of either a demented or a highly-judicious mind. In this respect, a first-person account of a criminal case on behalf of the offender himself, as many of

Poe's stories illustrate, leads readers to be immediately exposed to the psychological profile of a criminal, but nevertheless, the reader is still well aware that this first-person narrative is circumscribed to the subjective testimony of a demented – and often, unreliable – mind, thus establishing a differentiation between the reader's point of view and that of the narrator.

In opposition, as Jonathan Grossman contends, in the Newgate fiction – of which Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* is representative – the omniscient third-person narration that characterises these kind of novels contributes to blending the overseeing and controlling perspective of a realistic narration with the inward point-of-view of the criminal without making any explicit differentiation, thus allowing readers to move from adopting an authoritative distance from the criminal character to feeling in communion with this liminal member of society.⁴⁹ As Grossman further argues, novels like Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, which became pioneers of the omniscient treatment of the criminal character, ultimately became a source of moral dissatisfaction at the time, insofar as they mostly allied an authoritative viewpoint on society with the subjective perspective of the criminal without establishing any explicit difference between them. In this respect, the novels of Newgate fiction reflected the kind of third-person form of defence that lawyers had begun to provide in court, which contributed to blurring the distinction between an authoritative perspective representing the law, and the criminal's own testimony and subjective views on the deeds committed. Accordingly, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* adopts an indistinguishable bi-focalised perspective of observing at a distance but also aiding in giving shape to the criminal's defence. Owing to the moral dilemma it posed at the time, the troublesome narrative technique of omniscience for the psychological exploration of the criminal, as exemplified in novels pertaining to Newgate fiction, was subsequently left behind, as shown by the literary work that has conventionally been considered the first detective novel in English – Wilkie Collins' novel *The Moonstone* (1868) – which, in its epistolary format, provides a series of accounts on behalf of different witnesses, who

⁴⁹ Jonathan H. Grossman. "In the Courtroom of Bulwer's Newgate Novels: Narrative Perspective and Crime Fiction." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 75.

provide their subjective explanation of the facts which eventually lead Sergeant Cuff to solve the case, thus establishing a clear distinction between the figure of the detective and any suspects of having indulged in criminal behaviour by means of discarding the use of an omniscient narrator.

According to Heather Worthington, as an author of crime fiction, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to follow a logical progression in his narratives, since, in his first Newgate text, *Paul Clifford*, the action revolves around a criminal with the aim of articulating the author's reformist message against some aspects of the penal code, whereas, in *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton focuses on the figure of the criminal in order to gain insight into the psychological profile of the delinquent's mind.⁵⁰ In this respect, through literary progression, Bulwer-Lytton moved from focusing on the crime itself to concentrating on the personality of the criminal. As Worthington further argues, the criminal figure in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* is presented as the embodiment of the individual, and is even initially portrayed in a sympathetic way, as an "alienated Byronic hero of romance,"⁵¹ and thus, the character of Eugene Aram is not entirely removed from the portrayal of other heroes that Bulwer-Lytton had drawn in previous novels, as is the case with the gloomy and isolated Romantic hero of his early novella *Falkland*. Bulwer-Lytton's compassionate portrayal of a hero, who turns out to be a criminal, significantly aids in exonerating him from any criminal act, especially judging from his apparently innocent looks, as shown in the quotation below:

He was a man who might, perhaps, have numbered some five and thirty years; but, at a hasty glance, he would have seemed considerably younger. [...] Nature had originally cast his form in an athletic mould; but sedentary habits, and the wear of mind, seemed somewhat to have impaired her gifts. His cheek was pale and delicate; yet was rather the delicacy of thought rather than weak health. [...] There was a singular calmness, and, so to speak, profundity of thought, eloquent upon its clear expanse, which suggested the idea of one who had passed his life rather in contemplation than emotion. It was a face that a physiognomist would

⁵⁰ Heather Worthington. "Against the Law: Bulwer's Fictions of Crime." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 63.

⁵¹ Heather Worthington. "Against the Law: Bulwer's Fictions of Crime." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 63.

have loved to look upon, so much did it speak both of the refinement and the dignity of intellect.⁵²

Bulwer-Lytton's prosopography of his character Eugene Aram places emphasis on his superior intellect, his delicate frame, his calm disposition, and his younger looks in spite of his actual chronological age. The schism separating the character's appearance from his true nature – as is eventually shown in the novel – bespeaks of Bulwer-Lytton's belief that apparently respected members of society can turn into criminals, and that an inherent criminal capacity is shared by all individuals within the social community. In this respect, as Allan Conrad Christensen claims, Bulwer-Lytton found a profound – even if gloomy – sublimity in the notion that each individual possesses an evil demon,⁵³ and it might be owing to the author's belief in the inherent dual nature of human beings that he produced an eminently sympathetic – and even exculpating – portrayal of Eugene Aram, especially given the author's choice of an omniscient narrator focalised on the character of the criminal-hero that, for the most part, blurs the distinction between a detached approach to reality and the subjective perspective of the criminal character.

Nonetheless, taking into consideration the final revelation that Eugene Aram is guilty of a terrible crime, Bulwer-Lytton's description of the criminal-hero at the beginning of the novel places an important emphasis on the contrast between his appearance and his inner nature, particularly and significantly, with regard to aging, insofar as Eugene Aram is alleged to look younger than his chronological age. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's criminal-hero is conferred a vampiric quality that, at an early stage in the novel, paradoxically endows him with both alluring and repulsive traits, insofar as his physical portrayal draws on the formulaic characterisation of vampires, who are young and innocent-looking in appearance, but aged and terribly cunning inside. In fact, Eugene Aram appears to be younger than he actually is, especially when he turns into a close acquaintance of the Lester family, and becomes engaged to marry the young Madeline Lester. It is in this respect that Bulwer-Lytton's criminal-hero,

⁵² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 38.

⁵³ Allan Conrad Christensen. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976): 64.

Eugene Aram, acquires the symbolic quality attached to vampires as an aged individual nourishing on the life-sustaining blood of the youth⁵⁴ – to use Teresa Mangum’s words in relation to aging and Victorian narratives of vampires – many years prior to the publication of Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* (1897). However, it is when he is alone with his antagonist and rival for the love of Madeline – the young Walter Lester – that Eugene Aram discloses his actual feelings about his process of aging as a scholar, which, by extension, could also be extended to Bulwer-Lytton’s emotional state at this stage of his life as a result of the extenuating literary drudgery to which he felt forced to yield:

It is a hard life we book-men lead! [...] Our enjoyments are few and calm; our labour constant; but that is not the evil, sir! – the body avenges its own neglect. We grow old before our time; we wither up; the sap of youth shrinks from our veins; there is no bound in our steps. We look about us with dimmed eyes, and our breath grows short and thick, and pains, and coughs, and shooting aches, come upon us at night: it is a bitter life – a bitter life – a joyless life. I would I had never commenced it.⁵⁵

Eugene Aram’s testimony above brings to the fore the clear differentiation existing between his youthful looks and the internal process of premature aging that he feels exposed to owing to the sedentary habits acquired throughout his life as a scholar. This schism between his young appearance and his true aged nature at an initial point in the narrative already foretells the eventual moment by the end of the novel when Eugene Aram shows his true colours and proves that he is only young and innocent in appearance. Likewise, it is also worth noticing that, judging him at first sight, his scholarly habits have endowed Eugene Aram with a refined and distinguished intellectual look, and yet, as the character himself contends in the quotation above, it is this same lifetime devotion to study that has also led him to grow internally aged before time. Accordingly, even though Bulwer-Lytton’s initial portrayal of his character Eugene Aram in the novel proves ultimately deceitful, the romanticised profile that Bulwer-Lytton provides of his criminal-hero underpins the author’s identification with

⁵⁴ Teresa Mangum. “Growing Old: Age.” (Herbert F. Tucker. Ed. *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 107.

⁵⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 58.

some of Eugene Aram's identifying traits, especially inasmuch as both personify the paradigm of the intellectual figure.

If, in order to elaborate a misleading portrayal of Eugene Aram that would conceal his ultimate wicked nature, Bulwer-Lytton made use of the ageist attitude whereby a youthful-looking individual is taken to be inherently good – which the nineteenth-century archetype of the vampire contributed to undermining, similarly enough, in his tale “Thou Art the Man,” Poe also resorted to another stereotypical approach to aging grounded in the belief that the aged are weak and frail, and therefore, incapable of indulging in criminal endeavours. In Poe's tale, the narrator repeatedly refers to the appellative whereby Charles Goodfellow acquires popularity in town – that is, ‘Old Charley Goodfellow.’ Nonetheless, it is important to notice that Poe's tale mostly consists in the narrator's account of how he came about the evidence to accuse Charles Goodfellow of the murder of Barnabas Shuttleworthy, and therefore, it can be assumed that the narrator is aware of the wicked nature of Charles Goodfellow from the beginning of his testimony. And yet, he insists on referring to the criminal of the story through this affectionate appellative, precisely with the aim of underlining his knowledge about the difference between the way Goodfellow is perceived socially and his actual inner nature. In this respect, all the inhabitants in town consider the aging Charles Goodfellow to be a truly honest man, as the narrator in Poe's tale asserts in the following way:

Now, ‘Old Charley Goodfellow,’ although he had been in Rattleborough not longer than six months or thereabouts, and although nobody knew anything about him before he came to settle in the neighborhood, had experienced no difficulty in the world in making the acquaintance of all the respectable people in the borough. Not a man of them but would have taken his bare word for a thousand at any moment.⁵⁶

Accordingly, in Poe's tale, Charles Goodfellow is publicly-acknowledged as an honest and truthful man, although this opinion, which most people share, appears to be merely

⁵⁶ Edgar Allan Poe. “Thou Art the Man.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1045.

grounded in the public image he projects as a friendly and sociable, aged fellow. Hence, even if making use of opposing stereotypical approaches to age – judging Eugene Aram to be innocent for his youthful looks, and regarding Charles Goodfellow as an honest individual for being old – both Bulwer-Lytton’s novel and Poe’s tale place great emphasis on the appearance of these characters only to unmask their true nature later on. Likewise, in both narratives, these criminals, Eugene Aram and Charles Goodfellow, also have in common that they are individuals who are highly respected for their intelligence and extraordinary knowledge. In fact, in Poe’s tale, the narrator contends that “the people of Rattleborough had, indeed, so high an opinion of the wisdom and discretion of ‘Old Charley’,”⁵⁷ while the Lester family also hold Eugene Aram in high esteem owing to his remarkable erudition as an academic and his lonely habits as a gloomy scholar. It is in this sense – insofar as Eugene Aram is a scholar and Charles Goodfellow, given his evocative surname, brings to mind literary men contemporary to Poe – both characters become embodiments of the scholar-criminal, as they believe themselves to be above other individuals, owing primarily to their superior intellect.

In this respect, the alarming sense of superiority – and even of impunity upon committing murder – that haunts Charles Goodfellow in Poe’s tale and Eugene Aram in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel endows these characters with features that appear to foretell traits characterising the figure of the *Übermensch*. As the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche introduced in his seminal work *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (1891), the *Übermensch* – often translated as ‘the overman’ or ‘the superman’ – refers to a self-mastered individual who has achieved his full potential, taking for granted that the human race is positioned in a middle-ground between the animal kingdom and the potential figure of the *Übermensch*.⁵⁸ Likewise, ‘the superman’ is characterised by accepting his path in life and taking actions without regrets, as the

⁵⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. “Thou Art the Man.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1047.

⁵⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. [Trans. Graham Parkes] (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2005).

possibility of changing one's mind or one event in life would indicate the presence of fear or resentment; 'the superman' is endowed, rather, with courage and a remarkable Dionysian spirit. In this respect, *Übermensch* is alleged to express loathing for sentiments such as pity, compassion, or indulgence, as, from the perspective of 'the superman,' they are values associated with weakness and preclude him from advancing in his journey towards self-mastery. Moreover, a central aspect of the figure of 'the superman' lies in the concept of the will to power, which consists in the struggle against the surrounding environment and the reason for living in it, instead of devoting one's existence to the mere pursuit of happiness and pleasure. In Victorian times, the influence of Nietzsche's notion of the 'superman' became particularly reflected in George Bernard Shaw's play *Man and Superman*, written in 1903.

In his soliloquies, the scholar-criminal in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram, appears to share many of the tenets traditionally related to the figure of 'the superman,' especially insofar as he holds on to his conviction that his crime should be mostly envisioned as a means to an end, and thus, attempts to convince himself that there is no reason to feel remorse, even though it could be argued that his compulsion to engage in monologues and ponder about his deed in his loneliness somehow betrays an inherent sense of guilt. Nonetheless, Eugene Aram's ideas about the need to accept one's fate and avoid any regrets from the past, as well as his beliefs that his deed was necessary for his advancement towards self-mastery present a significant resemblance with the precepts exposed by the figure of 'the superman,' as the following excerpt from one of Eugene Aram's soliloquies in Bulwer-Lytton's novel shows:

Away, then, with our vague repinings, and our blind demands. All must walk onward to their goal; be he the wisest who looks not one step behind. The colours of our existence were doomed before our birth – our sorrows and our crimes; millions of ages back, when this hoary earth was peopled by other kinds, yea, ere its atoms had formed one layer of its present soil, the eternal and all-seeing Ruler of the universe, Destiny or God, had here fixed the moment of our birth and the limits of our career. What, then, is crime? Fate! What life? Submission!⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 44.

Judging from the quotation above, as Keith Hollingsworth claims, Eugene Aram is presented as a lamenting fatalist and even as a pre-Darwinian evolutionist, who consoles himself in the hope that his learning will contribute to human perfectibility, but who actually cares nothing for society, as he devotes his whole existence to learning in willing isolation. Moreover, it is unveiled that he regards his pursuit of knowledge not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself.⁶⁰ In this respect, as Hollingsworth further argues, through Eugene Aram's reasoning, Bulwer-Lytton ultimately sought to expose the treacherous fallacy of taking some of the precepts pertaining to Utilitarian ethics too far, inasmuch as Eugene Aram deludes himself into thinking that his criminal deed actually responds to obtaining 'the greatest benefit for the greatest number,' thus convincing himself that his crime cannot be considered as such, as he rather regards it as a single act committed to advance the general welfare of humankind. In this respect, upon looking back on his crime, Eugene Aram justifies himself stating that "I became haunted with the ambition to enlighten and instruct my race,"⁶¹ while he almost explicitly defines himself as an advocate of Utilitarianism, inasmuch as he contends that "if thou wrongest the one, thou shalt repay it in boons to the million,"⁶² thus envisioning himself as a designated individual on whom there has been bequeathed the privilege of contributing to the advance of humanity. However, in spite of indulging in the fallacy that the murder of Daniel Clarke can be justified owing to the benefits that it will bring to humankind, it is also underscored that this crime will also grant its executor the economic means to devote his lifetime to the pursuit of knowledge. Hence, even though Eugene Aram rationalises his behaviour arguing that his wisdom will benefit the whole of humanity, his dedication to study rather seems to respond to solipsism, which detach him from society and make him feel above the rest of mortals.

In his role as a seeker of knowledge who aspires to intellectual eminence, Eugene Aram resembles other figures within the literary tradition, inasmuch as he trespasses limits that are considered forbidden from the perspective of morals and

⁶⁰ Keith Hollingsworth. *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens, and Thackeray*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963): 85.

⁶¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 353.

⁶² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 355.

ethics. In this sense, as James Campbell contends, Bulwer-Lytton drew on a composite design to write his novel *Eugene Aram*, as he blended features from realist narratives pertaining to Newgate fiction with the influence of mythical and literary figures that had been revived through the rise of Romanticism,⁶³ as is the case with the mythical Prometheus, the biblical Adam, and the literary characters of Manfred through Lord Byron's poem and Faust through Goethe's play. As an individual who, in his delusion, aspires to contribute to the advance of humankind, Bulwer-Lytton's character Eugene Aram is endowed with features that are highly remindful of Prometheus, who, in the Greek myth mostly popularised by Hesiod's *Theogony* – which appeared in the late eighth century B.C. – was a Titan considered the benefactor of humankind, inasmuch as he stole the fire from Mount Olympus to bequeath it to humanity against the will of Zeus, which ultimately caused Prometheus to be punished, as his liver was eaten daily by an eagle – symbolising Zeus – only to be regenerated by night owing to his immortal nature. Like Prometheus in the Greek myth, who steals the fire to confer it to humanity against Zeus' dictates, Eugene Aram also believes that his boundless pursuit of knowledge will contribute to enlightening humankind even if it also implies going against the law. Similarly, as the original Greek myth of Prometheus was transposed to Roman mythology, the Promethean prototype became recognisable in the early Christian era of late Roman antiquity, insofar as imagery related to the mythical Prometheus was used to represent the figure of Adam in biblical symbolism. Hence, like Prometheus in the Greek myth who ignores the dictates of Zeus and is consequently punished, the biblical figure of Adam also disregards divine mandates and is accordingly expelled from Paradise, and drawing further on the parallelism between these archetypes and Bulwer-Lytton's hero-criminal, like the biblical Adam, Eugene Aram also falls from grace into temptation and is also consequently punished and metaphorically expelled from Paradise, as he is forbidden to marry Madeline once his sin is exposed. A few years prior to the publication of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram*, the myth of Prometheus was revived through the release of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), inasmuch as it bore the subtitle of *The Modern Prometheus* and

⁶³ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 46.

transposed the creation of man by the Titans in the original Promethean myth to the creation of life by a scientist through the devious application of science and technology. As the daughter of William Godwin, who was a fervent admirer of Utilitarian principles, Mary Shelley wrote a narrative of caution whereby she warned about the dangers of misunderstanding the precepts of Utilitarianism, since, as her novel shows, this misinterpretation could lead to defending egoistical purposes for the sake of humankind. In this respect, as happens to Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel, Eugene Aram also feels entitled to play the role of God and ignore any moral precepts under the justification of benefitting others, thus mistaking his individualistic ambition for that of the greatest number of people under Utilitarian precepts. Following Mary Shelley's novel, her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, also showed his interest in the figure of Prometheus, when he published his lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), inspired by the Greek tragedian Aeschylus' *Prometheia*, and focusing on the torments of the Greek mythological hero, Prometheus, as he is subjected to eternal punishment for defying the gods, until his final release from captivity.

Drawing further on the parallelisms between Bulwer-Lytton's criminal-hero, Eugene Aram, and other archetypes exemplifying the figure of the scholar-criminal, another clear exponent within Romanticism that seems to have exerted a clear influence on Bulwer-Lytton's creation of Eugene Aram is the character of Manfred in Lord Byron's homonymous work *Manfred: A Dramatic Poem* (1817). In Byron's composition, Manfred is a noble living in the Bernese Alps, who feels suffused with guilt owing to the death of his beloved Astarte, and resorts to his mastery of language in order to summon seven spirits from whom he seeks the gist of forgetfulness, even though the spirits are unable to satisfy Manfred's petition. Similarly, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, although Eugene Aram tries to ignore his guilt for the crime committed, he often finds himself soliloquising during his walks in the forest, showing his incapacity to forget his devious past and his need to justify his deed. However, above all, in his eminent role as a scholar, Eugene Aram can be particularly regarded as a Faustian character, inasmuch as he commits a crime with the aim of devoting his life to learning and the unlimited pursuit of knowledge. In spite of the different adaptations of the

Faustian myth in the literary tradition, for the creation of his character, Bulwer-Lytton was particularly influenced by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust*, whose second part was published after the death of the German writer in 1832, that is, the same year in which Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* was published. In fact, the intertextuality between Goethe's *Faust* and *Eugene Aram* is undeniable, inasmuch as Bulwer-Lytton's criminal-hero makes an explicit reference to this German literary work in the course of his ponderings:

Everyone knows the magnificent moral of Goethe's *Faust*. Everyone knows that sublime discontent; that chafing at the bounds of human knowledge; that yearning for the intellectual Paradise beyond, which 'the sworded angel' forbids us to approach; that daring, yet sorrowful, state of mind; that sense of defeat, even in conquest, which Goethe has embodied.⁶⁴

It is also worth noticing that in Goethe's version of the Faustian archetype, even though Faust attracts the attention of Mephistopheles, the former is totally reluctant to succumb to the devil's temptation, as opposed to what happens in other adaptations of the myth, such as Christopher Marlowe's play, in which it is Faust himself who suggests the wager. Accordingly, it seems that Bulwer-Lytton intentionally took this cue from Goethe in order to envision his scholar-criminal, Eugene Aram, as an eminently tragic hero, since, even though he is guilty of murder, his crime is mostly presented as a result of doom, and eventually, it proves of no consequence, since, as will be shown, a turn of the circumstances befalling the hero, which take place shortly after his crime, could have prevented him from completing his misdemeanour, had he been aware of them.

Speaking against the defendant: guilt, conscience, confession, and ventriloquism

Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" are crime fictions that explicitly address legal and moral issues, such as the public accusation of the figure of the criminal and the confession or self-accusation of the criminal himself, thus placing emphasis on the public exposure of the guilty subject – as is the case with Charles Goodfellow in Poe's tale – as well as on the feelings of remorse haunting the

⁶⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 121.

criminal – as happens to Eugene Aram in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel. Drawing on Freudian theories, the state of guilt consists in the conflict that an individual experiences at not having obeyed the dictates of the conscience, and in this respect, guilt enacts the struggle between the psychic figures of ‘the *ego*’ and ‘the *superego*,’ as the cultural and the individual ‘*superego*’ establish strict demands with regard to certain decisions, which, if they are not taken into consideration, may involve the fear of conscience and the advent of remorse.⁶⁵ In spite of being a novel in which the criminal is eventually apprehended and punished for his crime, Bulwer-Lytton’s *Eugene Aram* is eminently a narrative that deals with guilt befalling an individual for having committed, to use James Campbell’s words, “a terrible act of violence at variance with his whole nature.”⁶⁶ As a matter of fact, as Thomas Hay Sweet Escott argues, the circumstances befalling Eugene Aram seem considerably crushing for anyone to endure, inasmuch as “poverty, bordering upon starvation, a mind preternaturally active, severe illness, [and] intense brain labour [appear to be] enough”⁶⁷ burden to bear so as to shed some light on the motivation that finally gives way to the criminal’s misdemeanour. Likewise, being a narrative mostly focalised on Eugene Aram, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel allows readers to feel sympathy for the figure of the criminal, especially inasmuch as he often regards himself as a victim of fate, and is presented as a tragic hero tormented by remorse.

In the study of guilt, the psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel argues that there is a series of strategies that work as tools of defence against the feeling of guilt,⁶⁸ as is the case with the ‘repression’ of guilt enacted by ‘the *superego*’ and ‘the *ego*’ against instinctive impulses, the ‘projection’ of guilt by means of blaming the victim, the act of ‘sharing’ the feeling of guilt, or the strategy of ‘self-harm’ with the aim of compensating one’s transgression, and thus, counteract any feelings of remorse. Given the way of coping with guilt that Eugene Aram exhibits in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, it can be argued that he

⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud. “The Cultural Superego.” (Peter Singer. Ed. *Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 49-50.

⁶⁶ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 45.

⁶⁷ Thomas Hay Sweet Escott. *Edward Bulwer: First Baron Lytton of Knebworth. A Social, Personal, and Political Monograph*. (London: Routledge, 1910): 176.

⁶⁸ Otto Fenichel. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946): 496.

mostly makes use of the defence tool of ‘repression,’ insofar as he keeps the secret of his crime to himself, even though in an example of ‘the return of the repressed,’ it is many years after the murder committed that he begins to gain insight into his feelings of guilt, especially as a result the menacing return of Daniel Houseman, who was his partner in crime. As an example, Walter Lester finds Eugene Aram mumbling to himself unintelligible words that denote his efforts at repressing his feelings of guilt in the course of one of his soliloquies during one of his walks in the forest. Nonetheless, although Eugene Aram primarily seems to resort to repression as a strategy to cope with his remorse, there are other defence tools against it that he also appears to typify. In fact, in his final confession, Bulwer-Lytton makes a note of characterising his victim, Daniel Clarke, as an entirely despicable character, thus declaring that “from the first I felt a dislike of the stranger, which indeed it was easy to account for – he was of a careless and somewhat insolent manner – his countenance was impressed with the lines and character of a thousand vices.”⁶⁹ Judging from his words against Daniel Clarke, it can thus be claimed that Eugene Aram also makes use of the strategy of ‘projection,’ that is, blaming his victim with the aim of appeasing his feelings of guilt. Likewise, even though he is reluctant to hand himself in, Eugene Aram ultimately confesses his crime to Walter Lester after he incriminates him and accuses him of murder, even though Aram begs him not to share his secret with anyone else, thus resorting to the strategy of ‘sharing’ his guilt with at least one person in order to assuage his feelings of remorse. Finally, in an epic scene, Eugene Aram also typifies the strategy of ‘self-harm’ to cope with guilt, as, shortly before his execution, he is found covered with blood in his cell, since, as narrated in the novel, “he had opened his veins in two places in the arm with a sharp instrument which he had contrived to conceal.”⁷⁰ Accordingly, it can be argued that Eugene Aram feels suffused with feelings of guilt owing to his crime, and resorts to different strategies to cope with remorse, especially the defence tool of ‘repression,’ even if this often involves an unwilling return of memories of the deed that he seeks to repress.

⁶⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 355.

⁷⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 367.

As Nancy Jane Tyson points out, though, Eugene Aram only admits his feelings of remorse explicitly when he realises that the victim of his crime is Madeline's uncle, and thus, it is mostly upon gaining insight into the effects that his deed might have on his fiancée, Madeline, and the Lester family, that Aram feels overwhelmed with remorse.⁷¹ In this respect, it can be claimed that it is at this point that Eugene Aram engages in a process of examining his conscience, inasmuch as, in Eric D'Arcy's view, it consists in the human drive that prompts individuals to avoid provoking contempt in others,⁷² while, in Eva Folgeman's judgement, it involves the capacity to see oneself from the point-of-view of another person.⁷³ Hence, it is when Eugene Aram leaves behind his seclusion and begins to feel affection for the Lesters, and especially, for Madeline – that is, when he begins to establish relationships with others and abandons his individualistic conduct – that his latent guilt mostly comes to the surface in order to haunt him. Likewise, in the novel, it is contended that, owing to his determination not to hurt Madeline and the Lesters, Eugene Aram prepares his own defence to testify in court, and he pleads innocent of the charges brought against him. In this respect, Eugene Aram appears to resort to what A.C. Bradley defined as 'critical conscience,' insofar as, even though the conventional moral ideas pertaining to a traditional conscience would urge him to confess his crime in court and plead guilty, Eugene Aram rather appeals to a deeper conscience in him that prevents him from hurting his beloved.⁷⁴ In this respect, through the individualistic behaviour that for the most part characterises his hero, Bulwer-Lytton also underscores his own feelings of guilt for devoting his time to writing in isolation, and avoiding the company of friends, relatives, and especially, of his wife, which would cause the unfathomable estrangement between them that would eventually give way to the failure of their marriage.

⁷¹ Nancy Jane Tyson. *Eugene Aram: Literary History and Typology of the Scholar-Criminal*. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983): 76.

⁷² Eric D'Arcy. *Conscience and Its Right to Freedom*. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

⁷³ Eva Folgeman. *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

⁷⁴ A.C. Bradley. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. (London: Macmillan, 1937).

Precisely owing to some identification with his hero on behalf of the author, Eugene Aram arises as an eminently tragic and even pathetic hero, inasmuch as he is turned into a literal victim of fate. In the course of his confession to Walter Lester, Eugene Aram admits that even though he slew Daniel Clarke to provide himself with enough money in order to devote his life to the pursuit of knowledge, he also unveils that, only three days after his felony, he was informed that a relative had passed away and had named him sole inheritor of his fortune. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram ponders about his doom in these terms:

Had I waited but three little days! Just Heaven! When they told me, I thought I heard the devils laugh out at the fool who had boasted wisdom! Had I waited but three days, three little days! [...] No, it was for this, for the guilt and its penance, for the wasted life and shameful death – with all my thirst for good, my dreams of glory – that I was born, that I was marked from my first sleep in the cradle!⁷⁵

Hence, it is in this way that Eugene Aram gains insight into the ultimate futility of his crime, coming to the conclusion that his actual offence – for which he is now punished by the torment of guilt – truly lies in his arrogance and conceit upon believing himself to be of a superior mind. The doomed quality that distinguishes Eugene Aram's misdeed brings to mind Arthur Schopenhauer's precepts of ethics in the context of penal law, as the philosopher defends that any choice made is preceded by some reason or motivation, and thus, it can be concluded that choices are not made freely, but are necessarily determined, since, after the original motive has made its appearance, the individual feels compelled to carry out the actions derived from that choice.⁷⁶ In this respect, Schopenhauer claims that the criminal code consists in a register of counter-motives to all criminal actions imaginable, thus defending that, beside every possible motive for committing a wrong, there is a more powerful motive for leaving it undone.⁷⁷ In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram exemplifies these precepts, since, had he not committed his crime, he would have reaped the same profit upon being named sole inheritor of a

⁷⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 361.

⁷⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer. *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. [Trans. E.F.J. Payne] (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing, 1974).

⁷⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation, vol. I*. [Trans. E.F.J. Payne] (New York: Dover, 1966).

fortune only a few days later. Nevertheless, once the motivation for murder enters his mind, he feels compelled to follow what he perceives to be his fate, and perform all the actions resulting from his wrongful decision.

However repentant Eugene Aram is for his crime, he refuses to confess being responsible for his misdemeanour in court, and it is only Walter Lester who manages to extract Eugene Aram's confession of being guilty of murder. Hence, Eugene Aram only responds to his critical conscience – the sort of conscience that Immanuel Kant defines as an internal court in which our thoughts accuse or excuse one another⁷⁸ – and feels only obliged to confess his crime – a confession that also acquires religious undertones – to the sole person, whom he feels, is entitled to judge him, that is, the son of his victim, Walter Lester. It is also significant to notice that Eugene Aram writes down his confession in a letter addressed to Walter, and thus, Aram never actually discloses his crime personally, but it is rather Walter who intermediates for him and speaks on his behalf – or rather, against him – when, years later, he gives voice to Aram's confession. In this respect, Walter extracts the confession from Eugene Aram and also speaks in his name in what metaphorically constitutes an act of ventriloquism, which, by extension, also evokes Bulwer-Lytton's own display of literary ventriloquism, as he explicitly addresses the reader to speak on behalf of his hero-criminal, and thus, like Walter Lester, he also presents Eugene Aram's written confession:

For the reader's interest we think it better (and certainly it is more immediately in the due course of narrative, if not of actual events) to lay at once before him the confession that Aram placed in Walter's hands, without waiting till that time when Walter himself broke the zeal of a confession.⁷⁹

If, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram's confession metaphorically involves an act of ventriloquism, in Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man," the detective and narrator of the story also makes use of the same strategy – that is, ventriloquism – to extract a confession from Charles Goodfellow. Throughout Poe's narrative, Charles Goodfellow complains about not receiving the shipment of bottles of wine that his friend Barnabas

⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. [Trans. Mary J. Gregor] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 351.

had promised before his sudden disappearance. Aware that Goodfellow expects to receive the wine, the detective sends him a box, which Goodfellow immediately takes for the shipment of wine, but actually carries the corpse of his victim and is equipped with a mechanism that forces the corpse to spring to a sitting position when the box opens, while the accusing words ‘thou art the man’ are spoken and addressed to Goodfellow, thus publicly accusing him of the murder of Barnabas Shuttleworthy. In the narrative, the narrator and detective unveils his devised plan to extract Goodfellow’s confession as follows:

I gave instructions to my servant to wheel the box to Mr. Goodfellow’s door, in a barrow, at a given signal from myself. For the words which I intended the corpse to speak, I confidently depended upon my ventriloquial abilities; for their effect, I counted upon the conscience of the murderous wretch.⁸⁰

According to Thomas Ollive Mabbott, scenes of ventriloquism became pervasive in the narratives of the time after its use was popularised by Charles Brockden Brown’s novel *Wieland; or, the Transformation: An American Tale* (1798),⁸¹ even though, in his tale “Thou Art the Man,” Poe’s use of ventriloquism seems rather to respond to significant personal reasons. Given the fact that ventriloquism consists in an act of stagecraft whereby ventriloquists change their voice so that it appears that their voice is coming from a dummy, ventriloquial practices bear an acute resemblance with the illicit act of plagiarism, insofar as this illicit practice involves the wrongful appropriation of an author’s words and ideas as if they were original. Accordingly, it can be argued that, if Bulwer-Lytton made use of a symbolic literary ventriloquism to present Eugene Aram’s confession –and by extension, his own feelings of guilt at the time – Poe also resorted to ventriloquism as the device whereby the detective in his tale accuses Goodfellow of his crime, while this ventriloquial – insofar as it is literary – accusation in the tale also matches Poe’s actual allegations of plagiarism against the writer Henry Wadsworth

⁸⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. “Thou Art the Man.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbot. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1059.

⁸¹ Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1042.

Longfellow. Likewise, taking into consideration that Poe characterises the narrator in the tale as skilled in ventriloquial practices, it can be claimed that Poe was also bringing to the fore the charges of plagiarism that were often brought against him,⁸² which, in the narrative, help the detective expose Goodfellow's devious ways. The device that the detective concocts to inculcate Goodfellow – especially, insofar as the former scrutinises the criminal's reaction upon being ventriloquially accused by the corpse of his victim – evokes the famous scene of 'a play within a play' in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, whereby the Danish prince seeks to detect traces of Claudio's guilt, as he is watching a play that faithfully replicates Claudio's murder of his brother, Hamlet's father. Furthermore, the words that Barnabas' corpse utter on behalf of the detective and that give name to Poe's tale – 'thou art the man' – acquire biblical undertones, as they refer to the passage in the Second Book of Samuel from the Bible, in which the prophet Nathan uses these same words to accuse King David of slaying Uriah the Hittite and seducing his wife, Bathsheba. Hence, the utterance of this phrase – especially, given its biblical echoes – endows the detective with a semireligious role that entitles him to pass judgement on Charles Goodfellow and unveil his fallacious nature.

Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" thus places a greater emphasis on the act of accusing Charles Goodfellow, while Bulwer-Lytton's novel mostly underscores the feelings of guilt befalling its hero. In fact, drawing on Freud's seminal essay "Neurosis and Psychosis" (1924), it can be argued that Poe's tale mostly enacts the conflict between 'the *ego*' and the external world – which for the most part defines the traits characterising the psychotic personality – insofar as the detective, as embodiment of 'the *ego*,' feels concerned to solve a criminal case, inculcate its perpetrator, and expose his blame openly. Conversely, though, Bulwer-Lytton's novel focuses instead on the conflict between the figures of 'the *ego*' and 'the *superego*' – which describes the qualities of the neurotic personality – as exemplified in the character of Eugene Aram,

⁸² Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 310.

who feels torn between his egoistical ambition and a perturbing feeling of guilt.⁸³ Likewise, with respect to the punishment inflicted on the criminals for their misdeeds, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram is tried in court, he is charged with murder, and is sentenced to the capital punishment, while, in Poe's tale, even if Goodfellow's guilt is publicly divulged, he is not apprehended, tried, or punished by law. In this respect, it can be argued that Poe's story mostly refers back to past events, as the detective gives an accurate account of the events that finally lead him to assert Goodfellow's guilt, while the plot in Bulwer-Lytton's novel mostly develops ahead, towards the point at which Eugene Aram is punished for his crime. In fact, it is only through Eugene Aram's confession addressed to Walter Lester that the action of the novel moves backwards in time.

Drawing on Arthur Schopenhauer's precepts on criminal law, he claims that punishment is necessarily different from revenge, inasmuch as revenge is motivated by what has happened, and thus, by the past, while the law and its fulfilment are essentially directed towards the future in order to prevent future crimes.⁸⁴ In this sense, Poe's tale places a prominent stress on the past, as "Thou Art the Man," precisely because it can be interpreted as a tale of revenge, since the narrator – inasmuch as he also bears some resemblance with Poe himself – is not concerned about seeing Goodfellow in prison. On the contrary, his distress seems rather to respond to a personal motive, which – drawing on a biographical interpretation of the tale – is that of avenging himself in a long ongoing literary battle, in which Poe sought to defend himself from being wronged as an aspiring writer, as well as from what he perceived as the unjust accusations of plagiarism that he was made to bear. In contrast, the emphasis placed on the eventual apprehension and ultimate punishment of the character of Eugene Aram in Bulwer-Lytton's novel underscores its direction towards its final resolution, which unveils the pervasive need to expiate the guilt of the hero, and by extension, following a

⁸³ Sigmund Freud. "Neurosis and Psychosis." [Trans. James Strachey] (James Strachey. Ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX (1923-25). London: Vintage, 1961): 147-153. 149.

⁸⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I. [Trans. E.F.J. Payne] (New York: Dover, 1966).

biographical reading of the novel, of the author himself, owing to the fact that he often censored himself for his individualistic and licentious behaviour as a writer of crime fiction. However, in spite of this emphasis on the hero's eventual atonement, it can also be argued that, through extracting the confession from Eugene Aram, Walter Lester metaphorically inherits his pervasive feeling of guilt, as it is owing to his public accusation of the hero-criminal that the woman that he loves, Madeline, who is also Aram's fiancée, ultimately dies. In fact, in an end that is highly evocative of Lockwood's arrival at Heathcliff's house in Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847), upon his return, Walter arrives at the house of the Lesters to find it decrepit and neglected, "as if the curse which had fallen on the inmates of either mansion still clung to either roof."⁸⁵ As Eugene Aram slew his father, and thus, metaphorically usurped his place, upon the death of Eugene Aram, Walter became his symbolic inheritor and the living embodiment of his guilt, inasmuch as he will carry Eugene Aram's confession – and by extension, his dark secret – with him to the grave.

* * *

Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" focus on the symbolic demise of a parental figure – that of Geoffrey Lester and Barnabas Shuttleworthy – and on the aging and maturation of Walter Lester and Pennifeather, through the psychological developmental process of internalising a surrogate parental figure in the absence of the genuine patriarchs, and the prevalence of the psychic figure of the cultural as well as the individual *superego* in the personality of these characters. As happened to the respective authors of these fictions at the time, through the action of this symbolic internalised moral role in the absence of a parental figure, the characters of Walter Lester and Pennifeather gain insight into their part as successors of a symbolic absent father and begin to question their legitimate condition as legal heirs of their parents. Accordingly, when Eugene Aram is found guilty of the murder of Geoffrey

⁸⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Eugene Aram: A Tale*. (New York: International Book, 1849): 372.

Lester, he is also symbolically charged with the scheming determination of replacing him, thus illicitly appropriating the role corresponding to his son, Walter, who eventually sanctions his oft-questioned legitimacy as successor by means of unmasking Eugene Aram and avenging the memory of his father. Similarly, in Poe's tale, Charles Goodfellow murders Barnabas Shuttleworthy, and by so doing, he also threatens to usurp the role assigned to his nephew, Pennifeather, until Goodfellow's culpability is eventually exposed, and Pennifeather manages to regain his legitimacy as legal successor of his late uncle.

Likewise, these fictions are also indicative of the personal situation befalling the authors at the time in their role as writers of crime fiction, inasmuch as the process of publishing his novel *Eugene Aram* unleashed haunting feelings of guilt and the personal requirement of expiating himself, whereas Poe's tale "Thou Art the Man" underscored its author's concern to enact the symbolic literary battle in which he was taking part together with a series of renowned writers of the time. In this respect, both fictions underline an increasing insight on behalf of their authors into their public persona and social status as acclaimed writers of fiction. For Bulwer-Lytton, the fact of featuring a criminal as the hero of his novel and the harsh criticism that his choice unleashed from the press at the time urged the author not only to defend his right to write crime fiction through his critical works *A Word to the Public* and "On Art in Fiction," but also to introduce significant alterations and even rewrite important aspects in later editions of the novel, which necessarily showed his feelings of guilt as a writer of crime fiction and his need to look for public expiation. Conversely, though, Poe symbolically envisioned his tale "Thou Art the Man" as a *roman à clef* that would allow him to make use of his role as a writer in search of a highly-acclaimed status to defend himself from veiled accusations of being an imitator and even of resorting to plagiarism, by means of the creation of a detective who precisely makes use of ventriloquism – given its similarities with the illicit practice of plagiarism – to expose Charles Goodfellow as the murderer of Barnabas Shuttleworthy.

The writing of *Eugene Aram* and "Thou Art the Man" also involved a step forward for the authors in their careers as writers of crime fiction, insofar as they

produced in-depth psychological profiles of the figure of the criminal, especially in the case of Bulwer-Lytton's novel, which, through the use of an omniscient narrator that focuses on the character of the criminal, ultimately produces a sympathetic sketch of Eugene Aram, who, in spite of his condition as villain, also turns into the hero of the novel. Likewise, the historical figure of the actual criminal, Eugene Aram, turns into a significant piece of evidence to support the intertextuality existing between both authors, insofar as, in the course of his research, Bulwer-Lytton discovered that the historical Eugene Aram had been directly related to his family as tutor of one of his paternal aunts, while, in his childhood, Poe attended the school at Stoke Newington in England where the real Eugene Aram had worked as a schoolmaster. This personal connection with this historical criminal led Bulwer-Lytton to romanticise the profile of his hero-criminal, particularly as, at this stage of his life, characterised by acute literary drudgery, the author felt identified with his isolated life as a scholar and the intellectual ambition of his hero.

Nonetheless, even if as renowned authors of fiction Bulwer-Lytton and Poe acknowledged the importance of public status as literary men, in these fictions, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe also characterised the figure of the intellectual man as individualistic, and also addressed the fallacy of the superior intellect that ultimately conditions and provokes the moral fall of Eugene Aram and the prosecution of Charles Goodfellow. Likewise, through a portrayal that resorts to stereotypical characterisations of aging – Eugene Aram being considered blameless for his youthful looks, and Goodfellow being regarded as honourable for his aging physical traits – Bulwer-Lytton and Poe already hinted at the dual nature of characters that are only honest and decent in appearance. As their true nature is ultimately unveiled through the detective work of Walter Lester in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and of the sleuth himself in Poe's tale, the outcome of the narratives places, eventually, emphasis on the notions of guilt and expiation in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and on blame and accusation in Poe's tale, as indicative of the feelings that respectively befell the authors at the time. At this stage of their aging process, detached and estranged from their parental background, and with a symbolic internalisation of the absent parent figure which underlined the psychic part of 'the

superego' in their personality, it could be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton's feelings of guilt, as canalised through his novel, responded to the symbolic struggle between the *ego* and *superego* parts of his personality, while, Poe's concern about blame and accusation in his own defence underscored the metaphorical fight between the psychic part of his *ego* and the external world. This turning-point in their lives, which was conditioned by their personal situations and was evoked in the fictions they wrote at the time, allowed them to gain insight into their progress into aging, thus sanctioning their independence as individuals in the absence of a symbolic parental figure.



Figure 7 - Knebworth House, Hertfordshire, 1847. Taken from: Sibylla Jane Tyson.
Bulwer-Lytton. (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1973): 31.

Chapter Five

Falling Apart: Architectural Collapse and the Decline of Marriage in *The Last Days of Pompeii* and “The Fall of the House of Usher”

Bulwer-Lytton’s historical novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) was published five years prior to the publication of Poe’s tale “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), and at this point in time, Bulwer-Lytton had been married to Rosina Wheeler for seven years, although his relationship with his wife had turned particularly fractious, mostly owing to his arduous application to writing and his increasing ill health, which contributed greatly to increasing marital friction. In an attempt to solve their domestic difficulties, the couple decided to begin a tour of Italy, even though, at this stage of their relationship, their marriage appeared to be destined to fail. It is significant that, in this pivotal period which involved a turning-point in his life, Bulwer-Lytton decided to portray the decline of the Pompeian civilisation through a novel that, as Angus Easson notices, even if it is eminently historical, it also focuses on domestic events and the everyday life concerning the fate of a young couple as symptomatic of Bulwer-Lytton’s personal situation with regard to his wife.¹ As the plot unfolds in the novel, Greek lovers Glaucus and Ione witness the rise and fall of the ancient city of Pompeii, while their relationship, like the city of Pompeii, also remains under constant threat from the Egyptian priest Arbaces and the malicious patrician Julia, who concoct a mischievous plan to separate the lovers. Nonetheless, by means of the valuable help of Nydia – a

¹ Angus Easson. “‘At Home’ with the Romans: Domestic Archaeology in *The Last Days of Pompeii*.” (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004).

blind girl who is of also of Greek origin and is a close friend of the Greek hero – Glaucus and Ione manage to flee from the surrounding destruction of Pompeii and begin a new life in Athens. In this way, as a historical novel, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* symbolises the decline and the beginning of an era, while, on a domestic level, it also echoes the personal circumstances befalling the author at the time, which would mark the end of his marriage to Rosina. However, his eventual separation from his wife, with its implicit acknowledgement that marriage outside his social class had had disastrous consequences, gave rise to the renewal of an affectionate relationship with his mother Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, and the restitution of his mother's affection enabled Bulwer-Lytton to claw back his noble origins.

In analogy with Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel, Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," which was published five years after John Allan's demise, also portrays the rise and fall of an era on a domestic level, inasmuch as, according to Vincent Buranelli, it concerns the doom of an ancient mansion, and by extension, the dissolution of a decayed aristocratic family.² From a biographical perspective, "The Fall of the House of Usher" can be interpreted as Poe's elegy to the Allans, particularly with regard to the collapse of the relationship between John and Frances Allan, the eventual demise of Poe's foster father, and the author's eventual realisation of his rise and fall in the social spectrum, as inextricably linked to his discontinuous relations with the Allan family. These personal events are epically recounted in his seminal tale, insofar as it portrays the decadence of the last descendants of a noble family through the architectural collapse of their stately home, the eventual demise of Roderick Usher following that of his sister Madeline, and the narrator's departure from a house where he has been summoned, which finally collapses and is banished from view.

Unlike Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," which depicts the end of a family condemned to extinction, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii*, even if it also portrays the decline of a civilisation, for the most part underscores the beginning of a new era through the survival of the two young lovers Glaucus and Ione. In this respect, drawing on a biographical interpretation of the novel, it could be argued that, in

² Vincent Buranelli. *Edgar Allan Poe*. (New York: Twayne, 1961): 25.

spite of the fact that the termination of his marriage inevitably involved a turning-point in Bulwer-Lytton's life, prompting the end of a particular stage, it also enabled him to cling on to the hope of a new beginning at this stage of his life. The birth of his children, Robert and Emily Lytton, would necessarily ensure the continuation of his lineage despite the end of his marriage, while his renewed attachment to his mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, would sanction the duty assigned to him after his birth, which was that of being raised to a peerage and that of ensuring the continuity of the Lytton line. This turning-point would also be decisive for Bulwer-Lytton's way of approaching his process of aging from then onwards, since the rejection he had suffered on the part of members of his family as a result of his marriage to Rosina was left behind, and once he regained his mother's favour, he could gladly accept his responsibilities as heir to the Lytton lineage, prospective baronet, and eventual proprietor of his family's stately home, Knebworth House, in Hertford, following his mother's demise.

Conversely, Poe gained insight into the fact that any hopes of being accepted as a legal member of his foster family – and, thereby, of acquiring any important social and economic status through his family connection – were simply out of the question. This eventual realisation would ultimately have a negative effect on the way he would approach his life and his aging process at this stage, since he realised that he had to leave behind the prospects that he had coveted up to then and begin from anew at a considerably advanced age. The situation of having been excluded from the family lineage that he had considered his own for most of his childhood and part of his youth prompted an important turning-point in his life that would symbolically unleash a premature process of aging, giving way to his untimely death at the age of forty. In this respect, from the perspective of aging, his tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," published when Poe was thirty years of age, consists in Poe's retrospective fictionalisation of the author's farewell to the Allans, in particular, to the couple that he would consider his parents for most of his childhood and part of his youth, John and Frances Allan. Likewise, given the prominent role attached to the family manor in the tale, the fictional house of Usher clearly evokes the Allan stately home in Richmond, named Moldavia, which metaphorically symbolised the high social status of the Allans,

and through its eventual demolition, also denoted the debacle of the Allan family. Likewise, in clear resemblance with the narrator of the tale, who recounts his arrival at the house and final departure, Poe's physical entrance and retreat from Moldavia also signifies the author's rise and fall out of favour with regard to the Allan household.

The analysis of Poe's seminal tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* underpins the close connection that is established between a stately home and the family household that dwells within, as well as the importance attached to the continuation of a lineage, which also sheds light on the relations that Poe and Bulwer-Lytton maintained with their respective families at this stage of their lives. Likewise, both being narratives that place a significant emphasis on the pervasive presence of architectural constructions also underscore the intricate association between a house and a text, as well as between the acts of constructing and writing, and the way in which the authors envisioned the fictional rise and fall of a house as indicative of their respective personal situation with regard to their households. In this sense, the family manors of the authors – Moldavia as the home of the Allans, and Knebworth House as the home of the Lyttons – arise as a constant presence in their narratives, as their entrance and departure from them also denote their intermittent relation with their families and their origins. Poe's tale ultimately becomes a fictionalisation of the rise and debacle of the Allan family, as mainly personified by his foster parents, John and Frances Allan, whereas, Bulwer-Lytton's novel is an elegy to the failure of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler. Through narratives of decadence and closure, Poe bid farewell to his foster family, while Bulwer-Lytton fictionalised the rise and fall of his marriage and the renewed attachment to his mother, Elizabeth Barbara, after having fallen out of her favour.

The name of the house: stately homes, family ancestry, and endogamy

In both Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, the physical collapse of a house finds its counterpart in the death of its owners, inasmuch as the decay and ultimate fall of dilapidated houses echoes the inevitable debacle of the family inhabiting the house. In fact, in Poe's tale, the narrator

admits that the family name ‘Usher’ “seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.”³ This close connection established between a particular lineage and its stately home ultimately gives way to the fact that the family house becomes a personification of the family itself, particularly as it is considered an inherent part of the family legacy that passes on from generation to generation. In her study of Victorian houses, Judith Flanders corroborates this correlation, stating that the term ‘house’ was often used to refer to a ‘family,’⁴ thus stating that the physicality of the house was often mingled with more intangible, and even emotional, connotations, as the house became an emblem of a lineage, as well as of social status and economic strength. Stretching this parallelism further, houses were also considered outward indications of their inhabitants to the extent that they even became extended embodiments of their dwellers. Given the culturally inherent identification between a house and a lineage, this connection became pervasive in the collective imaginary in Regency and Victorian times and was often transposed in the literary fiction of the time, as novels whose title was the name of a family mansion – or a house inextricably related to a family or a social group – began to proliferate, as is the case with Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853), or Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* (1857).

As Judith Flanders further argues, in addition to the significant association of family houses with a particular lineage, stately homes also acquired relevance for the sense of prevalence and perpetuation that they often symbolised.⁵ From a historical perspective, the years extending from the rise of the High Victorian era to the end of the recession that marked the 1880s, were mostly characterised by change and dynamism, and, precisely, as a result of this prevailing hectic rhythm, Victorians began to envision the home as a still sanctuary, in which, as opposed to the current unsteady situation

³ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 399.

⁴ Judith Flanders. *The Victorian House*. (London: Harper, 2003): xxxvii.

⁵ Judith Flanders. *The Victorian House*. (London: Harper, 2003): xxi.

outside, things would change as little as possible.⁶ The home was thus considered a protecting shelter from the fastidious hubbub of public life, where the individual felt free from outside dangers, thus endowing the dweller with an important sense of solidness and permanence through time. Likewise, given the symbolism with which the Victorian house was endowed, the different rooms of the home often reflected the life course of its inhabitants and their gradual process of aging, from the nursery to the sickroom, from birth to death. The house thus became a container of time as it bore witness to the aging of their inhabitants as well as the progressive change from generation to generation within the same family lineage.

Accordingly, drawing on the premise that the family house became a metaphorical text which reflected the life stories of its inhabitants and how they progressed through their different life stages, the consideration of the differing relation that Poe and Bulwer-Lytton established with their respective abodes significantly reflects different stages in their process of aging. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's almost lifetime personal attachment to his family's stately home, Knebworth House, mostly during his childhood and old age, stands in sharp contrast with Poe's intermittent visits to his family stately house, Moldavia, and his perpetually itinerant lifestyle, thus retaining the metaphorical role of the *flâneur*, which even applied to the very last days of his life, as he would find himself roaming the streets of Baltimore, far away from home. In this way, to use biographer Peter Ackroyd's words, "Poe had a habit of moving on, wandering from one city to the next in search of good fortune [stating that] he never felt at home anywhere."⁷ As a case in point, in the year that his tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" was published, Poe had recently moved to Philadelphia after having spent most of his youth in Richmond, and from then onwards, his constant journeys until the end of his life would stand in sharp contrast with the virtual stability that had characterised the period that he had spent with the Allans in Moldavia.

⁶ Judith Flanders. *The Victorian House*. (London: Harper, 2003): xxi.

⁷ Peter Ackroyd. *Poe: A Life Cut Short*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008): 66.

In this respect, it can be argued that if Poe ever had a home, that was the city of Richmond, as he often called himself a Virginian,⁸ and it was there that many important events in his life were to take place, since his biological mother, Elizabeth Arnold, had died and was buried in Richmond, and it was also in this city that Poe eventually got married. Likewise, Richmond would also remain in Poe's memories as a reminder of his youth, and in particular, of his connection with the Allan household and his almost lifetime aspiration to claim some aristocratic origins. As Nigel Barnes claims, Poe particularly developed an awareness of class⁹ when he arrived in Richmond back from Europe, especially inasmuch as this city in the south of the United States was considered fairly upper-class, although Poe had already become deeply aware of the pressure of class prejudice and of social hierarchy in the course of his five-year stay in Great Britain. In a city such as Richmond, Poe felt surrounded by well-off comrades from fine ancestral stock, while he himself remained the orphaned son of two theatrical performers, and this led him to try to forge his own origins and to expect to become heir to the Allans, even though this hope was never to be fulfilled. Consequently, according to Vincent Buranelli, Poe began to play the aristocrat, as he referred to his family origins, claiming some mythical ancestry of Norman, German, British, and Irish bloodlines, and also alluded to his parental grandfather who had been a quartermaster during the Revolution and an acquaintance of General Lafayette.¹⁰ In this respect, Poe's concern about his social origins and his obsession with providing himself with some remarkable ancestral origins finds its counterpart in the presence of the highborn family of the Ushers in his tale, insofar as it is stated that Roderick and Madeline Usher come from an ancient family.

Nonetheless, being the last members of their lineage, Roderick and Madeline's existence is utterly condemned to dissolution, as the narrator admits that he "learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was,

⁸ Vincent Buranelli. *Edgar Allan Poe*. (New York: Twayne, 1961): 22.

⁹ Nigel Barnes. *A Dream within a Dream: The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*. (London: Peter Owen, 2009): 30.

¹⁰ Vincent Buranelli. *Edgar Allan Poe*. (New York: Twayne, 1961): 22.

had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch.”¹¹ It is thus assumed that the inevitable sense of doom and decadence that pervades the House of Usher is particularly grounded in the fact that the Ushers have no progeny or successor that ensures the continuation of their lineage. In this respect, the situation of the Ushers in Poe’s tale brings to mind the marriage of John Allan and his first wife, Frances, who were also an illustrious family, but never had any progeny, which greatly contributed to the fact that Poe nourished serious hopes of turning into their virtual successor. Likewise, the premature death of Frances, who died childless, left John Allan deprived of any legal successor of his fortune and stately home, in clear resemblance with Roderick Usher, who, upon the death of his sister Madeline, turns into “the last of the ancient race of the Ushers.”¹²

Likewise, the decadence that pervades the House of Usher also reflects Poe’s metaphorical process of stagnation at gaining insight into the fact that, even when he had established a family of his own, he remained virtually childless years after his marriage. In fact, when Poe published “The Fall of the House of Usher,” he had been married to his cousin Virginia for three years, and even though Virginia’s fragility and her comparative youth might have deterred any attempt at having offspring initially, her illness and eventual untimely death would ultimately prevent them from having any children. Poe may have also nourished some reservations with regard to having progeny, since his own traumatic experience, rooted in a tragic childhood as a son, might have also exerted a deep influence on him as a potential parent, especially as his biological father had deserted his wife and children, and soon afterwards, at a very young age, Poe would have to witness the premature death of his biological mother.

In addition to the lack of progeny that condemns the Ushers to extinction, Poe’s tale also underlines the prominent role that endogamy often plays in highborn families and lineages of noble origin. In fact, as Eric Carlson points out, it was the English writer D.H. Lawrence who first interpreted the fraternal relationship between Roderick and

¹¹ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 399.

¹² Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 404.

Madeline in Poe's tale as potentially incestuous.¹³ In this sense, the close attachment established between siblings Roderick and Madeline, and the ultimate fall of the House of Usher, may have been the result of committing incest, thus symbolically echoing the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden— given their biological link as Eve was created from Adam's rib – and thereby, identifying the Ushers with the biblical primal couple. The fraternal relationship between Roderick and Madeline also bears a close resemblance to that of Poe and Virginia, precisely owing to the apparently chaste quality that seemed to characterise their marriage, owing to Virginia's remarkable young age at the beginning of their union, the age gap between the spouses, and years later, her fragile condition as an invalid. As a matter of fact, Poe's marriage to Virginia caused quite a stir in the American society of the time, not only because, as her husband, Poe was thirteen years her senior, but also owing to the fact that Virginia was Poe's first cousin, and thus, part of his own paternal kin, being the daughter of his father's sister. Having been rejected as a member of a privileged lineage such as that of the Allans, Poe may have wanted to play the aristocrat and marry someone belonging to his own lineage, well aware of the concern of wealthy families to intermarry, or marry someone from the same social status, to prevent the loss of the family's estate and fortune.

As indicative of Bulwer-Lytton's awareness of his social positioning as an aristocrat, issues related to endogamy – interpreted as marrying within the same social set and even national origin, especially after his experience in a mismatched marriage – become vividly present in his novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. As the plot unfolds, it is revealed that the hero, Glaucus, is of Greek origin, and despite living in a foreign city at the historical moment when Athens was subjected to the Roman Empire, he enjoys a privileged social position as he is portrayed as blessed with “beauty, health, fortune, genius [and] illustrious descent.”¹⁴ In his role as a foreigner far from home, Glaucus reveres his origins, and becomes a great admirer of Greek poetry and drama, as they

¹³ Eric W. Carlson. “Tales of Psychical Conflict: ‘William Wilson’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’.” (Eric W. Carlson. Ed. *A Companion to Poe Studies*. London: Greenwood Press, 1996): 191.

¹⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 19.

remind him of “the wit and heroism of his race.”¹⁵ Likewise, in a conscious effort to remind himself of his national origins and pay homage to his homeland, Glaucus also adorns his mansion with representations of the Greek playwrights Aeschylus and Homer to make himself feel more at home. Likewise, dwelling among Pompeian citizens, Glaucus feels the need to join those who share his Greek ancestry, and even boasts about being able to identify and distinguish his compatriots from the rest of the citizens in Pompeii. In this respect, in the course of a visit to a temple in the Greek city of Neapolis, Glaucus meets and falls in love with Ione, stating that “I guessed at once that she was also of Athenian lineage, and that in my prayer for Athens her heart had responded to mine,”¹⁶ and interpreting this meeting as necessarily predestined, since it joined two nationals in a city under the rule of Rome. Significantly, Glaucus’ prediction is found to be correct, as the couple meets again in Pompeii, thus beginning a courtship which would eventually lead to their union in Athens, following their escape from the destruction of the city of Pompeii. As the plot of the novel progresses, Glaucus also has the chance of marrying the highly socially-esteemed Julia, a beautiful patrician from Pompeii, whom he finally rejects in favour of Ione, as he finds that the manners and piety of the latter are more attuned with his own noble character. The union of both lovers sanctions the coupling of two individuals of similar condition and citizenship, as they are both of Greek origin, living under the yoke of Rome, and their eventual return to their homeland allows them to live in liberty, raising their own family among fellow countrymen.

As a man of noble origins who finds himself at a juncture whether to marry a Greek woman pertaining to his same origins or a patrician woman who is also a citizen of the country who subjects his homeland, it could be argued that through the creation of the character Glaucus, Bulwer-Lytton shared the resentful memories of his marriage at a period when he began to notice its progressive decline until the final confirmation of its definitive dissolution. In his assumed role as heir to the Lytton lineage, Bulwer-

¹⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 19.

¹⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 16.

Lytton was well aware of his social position and family origins, as well as the importance attached to his family as an institution that would ensure the continuation of his aristocratic kin through time. The context in which he wrote this historical novel comprised the months preceding the tragic end of his marriage, when, in the company of his wife, he travelled to Italy, and visited the ruins of the ancient city of Pompeii. In his maturity, finding himself imagining the ancient splendour of Pompeii and its eventual collapse through the observation of its historical site, Bulwer-Lytton would give shape to his novel about the rise and fall of Pompeii, which, on a personal level, would also metaphorically reflect his union and ultimate separation from Rosina Wheeler. Precisely owing to his awareness of his social origins and his closer relationship with his mother, Bulwer-Lytton would mostly attribute the eventual failure of his marriage to what he perceived as a profound schism that detached him from his wife owing to their different nationalities and social origins. In fact, his marriage had taken place against the wishes of his mother Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, whose significant misgivings about her son's choice appeared to be mostly rooted in her disapproval of Rosina Wheeler's social and cultural background. In the Victorian society of the time, Rosina was, for the most part, considered an Irish beauty, a socialite, and the daughter of separated parents, while her mother, Anna Doyle Wheeler, was a renowned campaigner for political rights for women and highly acclaimed by French feminists and socialists. In this respect, to Elizabeth Barbara Lytton's mind, Rosina was of a descent that could not possibly match that of the Lytton lineage, and from her perspective as a Lytton heiress, the union of her son with Rosina was doomed to failure from its inception.

From the moment that Bulwer-Lytton disregarded his duties as heir to an ancient lineage by deciding to marry against his mother's will, it seems that his marriage was prophetically condemned. Nonetheless, this unfavourable prophecy would soon turn into reality when the differences in temperament between the spouses became evident enough in the first years of their marriage, as Rosina was fond of taking part in social gatherings and amusing herself, whereas Bulwer-Lytton preferred the quiet isolation required to give free vent to his imagination as a writer. Above all, though, their ill-matched union had particularly problematized Bulwer-Lytton's ties with his own family

and his origins as heir to the Lyttons, as he fell out of his mother's favour. The great anguish and torment he suffered during the period leading up to the disastrous end of his marriage – which becomes pervasive in the decadent atmosphere that characterises the novel and its haunting sense of doom – undoubtedly caused him to regret his dogmatic determination to marry Rosina and reinforced his resolve to pay greater heed to his mother's wishes. Through this turning-point in his life, Bulwer-Lytton surely gained insight into the importance of preserving the unity of the family and of marrying someone of similar condition and status, as Bulwer-Lytton ultimately contended that Rosina was far from his aristocratic circle, and his separation from his wife gave way to his mother's highly favourable estimation, and his eventual symbolic homecoming to his family's country estate, Knebworth House.

The architectural art of writing: houses as texts

The process of edifying and reconstructing the family stately home through the course of the years – as the case of Bulwer-Lytton's Knebworth House exemplifies – turns into a virtual emblem of cementing the origins of a lineage and of the aging of different family generations, as each proprietor leaves his particular imprint on the family manor. In this respect, building a house metaphorically resembles the act of raising a family, as both are inextricably related inasmuch as they involve processes of creation, and by extension, the process of writing literary texts that focus on a house as an embodiment of a family lineage also reflects the constructive process of the manor through literary creativity. In this respect, Poe's tale, inasmuch as it is a story about the rise and fall of a house, it is also indicative of Poe's own conceptualisations of construction and deconstruction, taken in both a literary and an architectural sense. Through his tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe displays his sense of constructiveness, and as Scott Peeples claims, the author adopts the role of a builder, as he presents "his personal philosophy of architecture into his fictional house,"¹⁷ and defines "his own principles of

¹⁷ Scott Peeples. "Poe's 'Constructiveness' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher'." (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 179.

good construction.”¹⁸ Hence, it could be argued that Poe’s tale “The Fall of the House of Usher” exemplifies the tenets that Poe would subsequently refer to in his critical essay “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846), whereby Poe restates the image of himself as a meticulous builder or mechanic, deconstructing the pieces that he needs to use in order to build the structures that make up a complete work of art. Poe’s obsession with constructiveness and structural art has been repeatedly noticed by critics such as Alphonso Smith, who claim that Poe’s greatest contribution to literature precisely lies in his fondness for constructiveness and structural art,¹⁹ especially as some of his tales display a special concern with building and arranging. In addition to his tale “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Poe also reinforced the parallelism established between literary creativity and architectural construction in tales such as “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842), in which passage through the different colourful rooms in Prospero’s castle ultimately recounts the stages in the life course until the clock strikes twelve and the red death begins to hold its dominion.

As Scott Peeples further argues, the construction and deconstruction of structures mostly responds to Poe’s fondness for metafictional self-reference,²⁰ thus establishing a parallelism between building houses and writing tales, architecture and art. This duality in Poe’s tale “The Fall of the House of Usher” is implied through a series of motifs of doubling that recur throughout the story and introduce the split between architecture and literature. As a case in point, the initial scene in which the narrator notices the reflection of the House of Usher in the tarn introduces the split between reality – the physicality of the house – and art – its reflection on the watery canvas of the pool – thereby pointing at the divide between reality and abstraction, which ultimately expands and bursts through the fissure, bringing about the eventual collapse of the house. At the same time, the fusion of the family manor with the tarn

¹⁸ Scott Peeples. “Poe’s ‘Constructiveness’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher.’” (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 178.

¹⁹ Alphonso Smith. “The Americanism of Poe.” (Charles W. Kent, and John S. Patton. Eds. *The Book of the Poe Centenary: A Record of the Exercises at the University of Virginia, January 16-19, 1909, in Commemoration of the One Hundredth Birthday of Edgar Allan Poe*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1909): 163-164.

²⁰ Scott Peeples. “Poe’s ‘Constructiveness’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher.’” (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 179.

underlines a never-ending process of rise and fall as the house enters the domain of the imagination. Hence, Poe's writing of the tale grants the house permanence in the realm of art despite its architectural collapse in the tale, as the act of reading enacts the process repeatedly, and thus, ensures its durability through time, insofar as the collapse of the house gives way to the creation of the story, and the subsequent everlasting re-enactment of the process.

Likewise, inasmuch as Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" reproduces the artist's fantasy of re-enacting the process of the rise and fall of the house, as well as of bringing this collapsed house back to its upright position,²¹ it can be argued that this repeated procedure of a symbolic death and rebirth also finds its counterpart in Poe's cosmological vision as expressed in his treatise *Eureka* (1848). In *Eureka*, Poe refers to the universe as the plot of God – inextricably linked to literary creativity – and portrays an ancestral recurrent process of dissolution and regeneration in the following terms: "Guiding our imaginations by that omniprevalent law of laws, the law of periodicity, are we not, indeed, indulging a hope – that the process we have ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever, and forever?"²² In this way, Poe's conception of the House of Usher as an architectural construction arising from his literary creativity can be interpreted as a microcosm which symbolises the author's theories about the creation and destruction of the universe, and by extension, about his own poetics of artistic design and literary creativeness. As Daniel Hoffman argues, Poe's concern about the recurrence of this process of construction and reconstruction – from a literary and architectural perspective in his tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," and also from a cosmological perception in his scientific treatise *Eureka* – arises as one of the author's particular obsessions and compulsions.²³ As biographer Kenneth Silverman notices, in his youth, Poe had to bear witness to the debacle of the company belonging to his foster father, John Allan, and his associate, Charles Ellis, which was named the House of Ellis

²¹ Scott Peeples. "Poe's 'Constructiveness' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher'." (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 188.

²² Edgar Allan Poe. *Eureka: A Prose Poem*. (New York: Putnam, 1848): 139.

²³ Daniel Hoffman. *Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998): 316.

and Allan – presenting significant echoes with the literary House of Usher – and the subsequent rise of the firm, which would culminate in the purchase of a new family stately home, Moldavia,²⁴ which, in turn, would also be eventually demolished in the course of time. In this sense, drawing on a biographical reading of the tale, Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” can be interpreted as the epic narration of the rise and fall of the Allan household and of the reversal of fortunes of the Allans, particularly through the intrinsic relation that the Allan family established with a series of houses, such as that of the firm, the House of Ellis and Allan, and that of the family, Moldavia.

As biographer Kenneth Silverman explains, when John Allan turned twenty-one years of age, he formed, with his associate Charles Ellis, a firm called the House of Ellis and Allan, which was located in the business district of the city of Richmond, offered many goods and services, and also operated internationally. Owing to its success, the House of Ellis and Allan provided well for the Allans, and it prospered so much that, in the year 1815, John Allan, together with his associate, decided to open a branch in London under John Allan’s direction, which was also to be called the House of Allan and Ellis. Likewise, Allan also envisioned this move to Europe as a means of alleviating his wife Frances’s chronic indisposition, which, in the event, would gradually turn worse, and would eventually have fatal results. Thus, the Allan family, together with Poe, who was a child, sailed for Europe, where they were to remain for five years. Nonetheless, high debts and the sharp fall of prices finally led to the collapse of the London tobacco market, and following the advice of his opulent uncle William Galt, John Allan decided to go back to Richmond, where they found themselves unsettled and financially troubled. Nonetheless, the metaphorical fall of the House of Ellis and Allan was soon to be followed by its eventual rise, as, even though back in Richmond the firm had to arrange a final settlement for bankruptcy, thanks to his uncle William Galt, who became a secret partner and bought the firm, John Allan managed to overcome a period of important economic constraints. Eventually, when William Galt, who was considered one of the wealthiest men in Virginia, passed away, John Allan inherited a fortune

²⁴ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 10.

estimated at three quarters of a million dollars, thus turning him and the Allans into a noticeably wealthy family. Hence, since his debts and lawsuits had virtually come to an end, John Allan decided to buy a new home, finally purchasing, at a public auction, an estate with a house on it named Moldavia, which would always be associated with the Allan family. Biographer Kenneth Silverman describes the splendour of Moldavia, the mansion of the Allans in Richmond, in the following terms:

Its eight outbuildings, cultivated vegetable and flower gardens, grapevines and fig trees, made it more nearly an estate than a house. Set on the slope of a hill and advertised as 'more eligible in point of situation perhaps, than any in the city,' it offered views of the James River and wooded hills beyond, as well as the capitol building. The interior shone no less: a spacious hall and wide mahogany stairway, generously proportioned rooms, a mirrored ballroom with hand-carved mantel, a tearoom, a notable octagonal dining room, to which the Allans added rich hangings for the windows and doors, expensive furniture, busts and paintings.²⁵

Being a family manor, surrounded by profuse vegetation and overlooking the river, Moldavia may well have reflected the magnificence of the House of Usher before its decrepitude and eventual debacle. It was in Moldavia that Poe lived with the Allans until he entered the University of Virginia in 1826, and thus, he was able to indulge in this splendour, as he moved into adulthood and acquired the ways of a Southern gentleman. Precisely owing to the fact that Poe got well-acquainted with the importance attached to status and class at this stage, he particularly resented the fact of being debarred from this splendour when he was literally expelled from Moldavia, and by extension, from the Allan family.

If Moldavia was inevitably associated with the Allans, Knebworth House, located in Stevenage, England, has been acknowledged as the stately home of the Lyttons far back since the Middle Ages, in the year 1492.²⁶ Even though the house reached the peak of its magnificence in the Victorian period, it was erected many centuries before, and it still conceals a red-brick house that dates back to Tudor times.

²⁵ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 28.

²⁶ *Knebworth House: Home of the Lytton Family since 1492*. (Brochure from Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertford, England): 2.

Sir Robert Lytton began to build Knebworth House in the last decade of the 15th century, and since then, successive generations have shaped the house according to their taste and requirements. In this respect, Knebworth House has remained a historical ‘palimpsest’ within which many texts have been inscribed through centuries, thus bearing witness to the passage of time. Knebworth thus arises as an architectural memento, evocative of memories and narrations that account for the progression as well as for the ups and downs of the Lytton family up to now, while asserting its permanence through the years. As a stately home, Knebworth has become a container of time for the Lyttons, and an emblem of persistence and endurance in space and time, thus turning it into a paradigm of the notion of the chronotope. The Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin defines the ‘chronotope’ – which literally means ‘time space’ – as the emblem of the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships as artistically expressed, thus sanctioning the inseparability of space and time, which are fused into one.²⁷

During Bulwer-Lytton’s time, Knebworth House was owned by his mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, and passed on to him soon after his mother’s demise in 1843. Elizabeth Barbara and her son Bulwer-Lytton were mainly responsible for most of the changes to the house, since its basic structure had remained virtually unaltered until the nineteenth-century, when Elizabeth Barbara demolished three sides of the original brick house and reshaped the residence to suit her demands. Subsequently, her son Bulwer-Lytton would envisage the house as a gothic palace, suitably matching his taste for the occult in the last stages of his life, while his son and heir, Robert, also added a third storey to the house as well as a larger wing for the servants. Hence, throughout time, the Lyttons have constructed and deconstructed their family stately home, Knebworth House, which has remained in perpetual change up to the present. The Knebworth estate still serves nowadays as a private home, but has been turned into a theme park and a museum open to the public, to the extent that it has turned into an emblem of the Marxian concept of ‘commodification,’ insofar as the term refers to the transformation

²⁷ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel.” (Michael Holquist. Ed. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. [Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist] Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 84-258.

of a historical site that normally would not be considered as a good, into a commodity in the Marxian sense of the word.²⁸ From its origins, when Sir Robert Lytton bought the estate up to his present-day descendant, Henry Fromanteel Lytton-Cobbold, who currently lives with his family in the same house, the history of Knebworth spans nearly six centuries, and despite the alterations effected through time, it still stands its ground.

Bulwer-Lytton's awareness of the importance of his family's stately home and the significance it bore for the Lytton lineage can be easily perceived in the quotation that still currently presides over the library in Knebworth House, which Bulwer-Lytton himself had inscribed following the classical author Virgil's words: "*Hic Vicunt Vivere Digni*," that is, "Here live only those who are worthy of life." Nevertheless, in addition to the historical grandeur often associated with Knebworth, Bulwer-Lytton's close attachment to the house also responded to personal and emotional reasons. His identification with Knebworth was particularly acute especially during his childhood, and then again when he moved back on reaching maturity and old age, thus symbolically fusing these two stages in his life. The family's stately home had borne witness to significant turning-points in Bulwer-Lytton's life during these phases, such as the moment when he was chosen heir to his mother's estate in his childhood, and then, in his maturity, after his mother's demise, when he was raised to the peerage and had to accept his responsibilities as a member of the Lytton lineage and legitimate owner of the house.

Above all, though, Bulwer-Lytton would mostly associate Knebworth with his mother, heiress to the Lyttons and owner of the house until he succeeded her, since he spent most his childhood and youth in his mother's company in the family house. In an essay included in his volume *The Student: A Series of Papers* (1835), Bulwer-Lytton expressed his personal attachment to his family's stately home, while he also inevitably referred to a sense of loss, as if the house and his presence in it reminded him of his process of aging, as his childhood and old age had become one within its walls. In his maturity, he remembered how he used to play by the lake surrounding the house, where

²⁸ Karl Marx. "Excerpt from *Capital*." (Julie Rivkin, and Michael Ryan. Eds. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 268-276.

he often indulged in daydreaming, finding in the physical reflections of its waters inspiration for the novels that he was to write. Bulwer-Lytton thus referred to Knebworth in these terms:

Amid the active labours in which, from my earliest youth, I have been plunged, one of the greatest luxuries I know is to return, for short intervals, to the place in which the happiest days of my childhood glided away. It is an old manorial seat that belongs to my mother, the heiress of its former lords. The house, formerly of vast extent, built round a quadrangle, at different periods, from the date of the second crusade to that of the reign of Elizabeth, was in so ruinous a condition when she came to its possession, that three sides of it were obliged to be pulled down: the fourth, yet remaining, and much embellished in its architecture, is in itself one of the largest houses in the county, and still contains the old oak hall, with its lofty ceiling, and raised music gallery.²⁹

Hence, Knebworth was also to bear its own rise and fall through time. For its owner, Bulwer-Lytton, who returned to Knebworth in his aging days, it arose as a reminder of a past irretrievably lost. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's reflections in his essay on his family's house, and by extension, on the memories of his childhood and youth as an adult are somehow reminiscent of those of William Wordsworth and his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," especially when the poet claims, "though nothing can bring back the hour / of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower; / we will grieve not, rather find / strength in what remains behind."³⁰ Similarly, in his essay dedicated to his family manor, Bulwer-Lytton admitted having often succumbed to melancholy when he spent some periods of time at Knebworth, either in the house, or walking by the lake, or in the forest surrounding his stately home. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton argued that he found solace in visiting Knebworth, as it reminded him of his youth, but at the same time, Knebworth also endowed him with a sense of mortality on his becoming aware of the unavoidable passage of time, thus stating on the one hand, "my departed youth rises before me in more wan and

²⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Knebworth." (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 39.

³⁰ William Wordsworth. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." (*The Norton Anthology of Poetry.* New York and London: Norton, 1996): 732.

melancholy hues,”³¹ and on the other hand, “with all our boasted antiquity of race, we ourselves are the ephemera of the soil,”³² thus also gaining insight into the transient quality of existence, while remembering his long-departed youth. In this sense, as an emblem of the notion of the chronotope, Knebworth House, in its amalgamation of the concepts of space and time, unleashed Bulwer-Lytton’s memories and his awareness into the aging process.

Bulwer-Lytton and Poe presented similar feelings with regard to the stately homes of their respective families, Knebworth and Moldavia, since their itinerant visits during adulthood reminded them of their youth and the passage of time, but the houses also turned into reifications of their expectations in life and future prospects, feeling that someday they could become owners of their respective family’s mansion. As architectural personifications of their own families, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe considered Knebworth and Moldavia with a mixture of awe and pride, while the dualistic melancholic and prophetic effect that the contemplation of their houses produced on both authors is significantly reminiscent of the descriptions of the House of Usher in Poe’s tale and of the temple of Arbaces in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel. The structural features of the House of Usher and the temple of Arbaces produce feelings of melancholy and fear in those that contemplate them. Both the narrator in Poe’s tale and Apaecides, Ione’s brother, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel draw attention to the simple and orderly qualities that characterise the places, thus focusing on “the simple landscape *features* of the domain”³³ of the House of Usher, and with regard to the temple of Arbaces, on “those large, and harmonious, and passionless *features*, in which the sculptors of that type of wisdom united so much loveliness and awe.”³⁴ In Poe’s tale, when the narrator approaches his destination, he finds himself “as the shades of the

³¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Knebworth.” (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 41.

³² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Knebworth.” (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 40.

³³ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 397.

³⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii.* (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 65.

evening drew on, within view of the *melancholy* House of Usher,”³⁵ while, when Apaecides arrives at the temple to meet Arbaces, the same mood seems to pervade the fearsome place, stating that “the darksome vines clustered far and wide in front of the building and behind it rose a copse of lofty forest trees, sleeping in the *melancholy* moonlight.”³⁶ In *The Last Days of Pompeii*, this pervading atmosphere ultimately induces a “nameless and ghostly fear” in Apaecides,³⁷ while, in Poe’s tale, the atmosphere prompts the narrator to eventually wonder “what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?”³⁸ Thus, both Apaecides and Poe’s narrator feel both fear and admiration in the same way, while they find themselves observing these architectural structures and reflecting upon them.

Through words, the narrators have been constructing the structures that make up the houses, finding their counterpart in the subsequent literary deconstruction that will ultimately cause their collapse. The rise of the house involves its subsequent fall, thus underlining that what can be constructed inevitably calls into play its own eventual deconstruction. Hence, as the inextricable link established between the houses and their owners proclaims the debacle of both Roderick Usher and Arbaces at the fall of their own mansions, from a biographical perspective, the authors’ attachment to their respective stately homes also underlines their unsteady relationship with their own families, which also seem subjected to a periodic rise and fall. Disagreements with their family members, also owners of their respective homes, would greatly determine the course of both authors’ lives, even if these would end in a significantly different way, since Poe would ultimately be debarred from Moldavia and deprived of his inclusion within the Allan household, while Bulwer-Lytton’s return in his maturity would sanction the improvement of his relationship with his mother, as he would spend

³⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 397.

³⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 65.

³⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 65.

³⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 397.

important periods in Knebworth in his late years. Through these texts, the authors were thus constructing and deconstructing their own family's story and the fate of their connections with their kin.

Throughout "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe implemented an exercise of construction and deconstruction of a house of fiction, which would perpetuate through time, since, according to Scott Peeples, "the house comes to life only to collapse and die, but for Poe, the fall of the house gives rise to the story,"³⁹ and thus, the permanence of the house is ensured by means of the creative process. Poe was thus trying to gain some sense of control through fiction, enacting his fantasy of bringing the house back to life after its fall. Likewise, for Charles May, the implosion of the House of Usher demonstrates "Poe's proto-deconstructionist vision" of reality,⁴⁰ as, through its deconstruction, Poe would later on try to reconstruct his own house, and by extension, his own family and heritage. Also drawing on the parallelism between the rise and the fall of the house as an architectural structure and the psychological progress of fall and recovery, for Richard Wilbur, Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" must be understood as the narrator's dream, whereby he leaves behind his bleak reality and makes his journey into his inner and spiritual self."⁴¹

Similarly, with *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Bulwer-Lytton also transposed into fiction, and thus, textualised the end of his marriage, and at the same time, ensured the beginning of a new stage in his life, and the continuation of his family lineage. As the volcano Vesuvius causes Pompeii to vanish, Glaucus constructs his own house back in his own homeland in the last passages of Bulwer-Lytton's novel, as he recalls the fall of Pompeii, and how its debacle allowed him to go back to his nation and raise a family of his own with his compatriot Ione. Hence, in analogy with Bulwer-Lytton, who went back to Knebworth House to begin a new life of his own, Glaucus is also able to go back to his origins, and start a new life in Athens that will ensure the continuance of his

³⁹ Scott Peeples. "Poe's 'Constructiveness' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher'." (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 188.

⁴⁰ Charles May. *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1991): 107.

⁴¹ Richard Wilbur. "The House of Poe." (Harold Bloom. Ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 1985): 59.

lineage, while, as is stated in the novel, he welcomes, surrounded by the marble faces of his ancestors and his ancient past, “the circle of eternity that rolls the wheel of life,”⁴² which extends on into the future. Hence, according to Sibylla Jane Flower, despite the tragic end of his marriage, for Bulwer-Lytton, “it was a period of renewal and refreshment [and] he recovered his health and shattered spirit,”⁴³ thus his prospects looked significantly more alluring than those of Poe.

The misfortune of a family and a fissure in the house

The debacle of a house and of a family that Poe’s tale “The Fall of the House of Usher” presents is evocative of the author’s intermittent relation with his foster family, but also of the collapse of the Allans, especially, as personified by their patriarch, John Allan, and in particular, by his symbolic fall in the moral sense of the word. Poe’s relationship with his foster father began to deteriorate ostensibly due to Poe’s gambling habits and his continuous requests for money, but John Allan’s stern character and his awareness of Poe’s origins and humble background were also deeply rooted in his increasingly severe behaviour towards his foster son. This situation found its reflection in the way that Poe was treated during his occasional visits to Moldavia, and especially, in the course of his last visit before John Allan’s demise. In this respect, it can be argued that the relation between John Allan and Poe is in some ways reminiscent of that between Roderick Usher and the narrator in Poe’s tale. In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the narrator is summoned to Roderick’s presence through a letter informing him about a bodily illness and mental disorder oppressing the owner of the manor. The narrator admits they used to be companions in their youth, but it is assumed that a long time has gone by since those old days, and he finds Roderick significantly altered both physically and mentally, and he can hardly recognise Roderick’s strange ways owing to his illness. As a result of the symbiotic relation that is gradually established between Roderick and his manor, Roderick’s deterioration necessarily anticipates the inevitable collapse of the

⁴² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 356.

⁴³ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1973): 16.

house. In fact, according to J. Gerald Kennedy, Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" turns into an allegory of the disordered mind, in which the house becomes the domain of unreason, and its collapse involves the psychological disintegration of its owner, Roderick Usher, through the symbolic and menacing presence of a fissure that threatens the stability of the house.⁴⁴ The narrator is already able to predict the inevitable debacle that is to come in the first passages of the tale when he admits:

Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the hall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.⁴⁵

Likewise, due to the inexorable passage of time and the impending resolution that is to ensue, the friendship that used to unite both companions in their youth seems long forgotten, as Roderick has turned into a completely different man, who is characterised as aged and terribly eccentric. From a biographical perspective, it is possible to establish a parallelism between the literary character of Roderick Usher and John Allan, as well as between the intricate relation that Roderick Usher maintains with the narrator in Poe's tale, and that of John Allan and Poe in real life.

John Allan's personality was full of lights and shadows. Apparently, he had an outstanding reputation for social benevolence and was considered a conscientious merchant, who was fond of defending values such as obedience, industry, fortitude, and perseverance. Nonetheless, his exacting and business-like manner never found a counterpart in visible displays of affection towards his family, much less towards his foster son Poe. In fact, it was mainly Frances Allan who showed interest in taking care of Poe as a child after the premature demise of his biological mother, and according to biographer Kenneth Silverman, even though John Allan first opposed his wife's wishes, he finally consented to bring Poe into their home. In general terms, John Allan was

⁴⁴ J. Gerald Kennedy. "Introduction." (*A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 7.

⁴⁵ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Fall of the House of Usher." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 400.

known for his pious nature, as he had been born into a Presbyterian family, and had also become a member of the local lodge of the Freemasons, who were an almost ancient fraternal organisation in Richmond that had aided in laying the cornerstone of the capitol of the city,⁴⁶ thus underlining the close ancestral connection existing between Masons and architecture, which is also echoed in Poe's tale, through the description of the regular features characterising the House of Usher. Likewise, John Allan's condition as a Mason brings him closer to Bulwer-Lytton's father, General Bulwer, who, according to Sibylla Jane Flower, was also considered a Freemason.⁴⁷ In this respect, it can be argued that John Allan ultimately took responsibility for the orphaned Poe after his father's disappearance and his mother's tragic demise in agreement with the Freemason's oath with which all the members of the group were requested to comply. Nonetheless, John Allan's apparent piety and meekness seemed utterly dismantled by his tendency to profligacy and his often flirtatious manner, of which Poe became well aware as he came of age, and which eventually resulted in the birth of some illegitimate children, as he would never have any offspring with his first wife, Frances. This metaphorical double personality that Poe was able to identify in his foster father is also transposed in his tale through the symbolic significance that the fissure of the house acquires and its symbiotic relation with Roderick Usher, which ultimately denotes the moral debacle of the character, and by extension, of his household, which, in turn, is also suggestive of that of John Allan. In this respect, the intricate and fraternal relationship between Roderick and Madeline Usher and its ultimate debacle as described in Poe's tale echoes that of John and Frances Allan. Likewise, the pervasive and claustrophobic sense of guilt – evocative, as pointed out before, of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – also refers back to the relationship that John Allan had with his wife Frances and the vexing treatment he had often inflicted upon her. Hence, it seems that what John Allan may have found particularly despicable in Poe merely underlined his own particular dark side, as if by reprimanding Poe for his conduct, he

⁴⁶ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 13.

⁴⁷ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury, UK: Shire, 1973): 33.

could, at the same time, expunge those aspects that turned him apart from his personal ethics as a Mason.

If the fissure that extends from the roof to the ground of the House of Usher anticipates the debacle of the Ushers, and by extension, the increasing tensions between the members of the Allan family – especially between John and Frances Allan, as well as between John Allan and Poe – the impending destruction of the city of Pompeii after an earthquake and the eruption of Vesuvius also come hand-in-hand with the final stages of Bulwer-Lytton's ill-fated marriage to Rosina, as is described in the novel in terms that are highly remindful of Poe's:

Far and wide along the soil went a hoarse and rumbling sound – the curtains of the chamber shook as at the blast of a storm – the altar rocked – the tripod reeled, and high over the place of contest, the column trembled and waved from side to side – the sable head of the goddess tottered and fell from its pedestal.⁴⁸

The debacle of the Ushers, as well as the end of the Pompeian civilisation, seems mostly to respond to corrupt moral reasons – such as incest and paganism – and thus, the lightning that expands the fissure of the House of Usher and the eruption that condemns the city of Pompeii might ultimately be interpreted as divine punishments that are meant to restore order and morality.

This haunting ghost of unfaithfulness within the Allan household as reflected in the decadence and symbolic fall of the House of Usher finds its counterpart in the domestic plot underlining *The Last Days of Pompeii*, as well as its sense of gloom, which also seems to echo Bulwer-Lytton's troublesome situation with regard to his marriage at the time. Even if their journey to Italy was meant to sort out the unremitting disagreements, Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina returned home after five months of apparently incessant arguments, and back in England, they agreed to a trial separation. As Leslie Mitchell mentions, it is almost a fact that Bulwer-Lytton was involved in extra-marital relationships at the time, while, his wife Rosina never accepted this double standard, and upon knowing that her husband was having an affair with a woman named

⁴⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 128.

Mrs. Stanhope in the course of their journey to Italy, Rosina began a relationship with a Russian prince called Lieven.⁴⁹ Actually, according to James Campbell, Rosina's continuous flirtations in Italy while Bulwer-Lytton did research for his historical romance might have led to the couple's final separation.⁵⁰ Hence, it was during the months preceding the tragic end of his marriage that Bulwer-Lytton imagined the ancient splendour of Pompeii, and its inevitable collapse, thus providing a literary counterpart to the rise and fall of his own union with Rosina Wheeler.

In addition to the identification of the house with its male owner, according to Judith Flanders,⁵¹ who draws on John Ruskin's views on women and the home as presented in his book *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), in Victorian times, the home was also principally considered a projection of the feminine.⁵² In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton mostly identified Knebworth House with his mother's abodes, and in fact, as a kind of homage, after his mother's demise, Bulwer-Lytton felt particularly concerned to preserve her chamber as she had left it for years. Even nowadays, the fireplace and mantelpiece presiding Elizabeth Barbara Lytton's bedroom in Knebworth still bear the legend her son Bulwer-Lytton inscribed on the wall, which reads like this: "This room was long occupied by Elizabeth Bulwer-Lytton and contains the relics most associated with her memory. Her son trusts that her descendants will preserve it unaltered."⁵³ Bulwer-Lytton's inscription thus denotes his wish to preserve the memory of Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, whom he both feared and idolised.

This sense of permanence that still presides over Knebworth House stands in sharp contrast with Bulwer-Lytton's itinerant life following his marriage to Rosina, living first in Reading and then finally moving to London, until the moment of their separation. Their courtship had already been tempestuous, as they finally agreed to get married after some previous quarrels and reconciliations, and hence, Bulwer-Lytton's

⁴⁹ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London: 2003): 39-40.

⁵⁰ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 10.

⁵¹ Judith Flanders. *The Victorian House*. (London: Harper, 2003): xxxi.

⁵² John Ruskin. *Sesame and Lilies*. (Deborah Epstein Nord. Ed. Yale: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁵³ *Knebworth House: Home of the Lytton Family since 1492*. (Brochure from Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertford, England): 16.

ultimate realisation and insight into Rosina's real character after some years of marriage – which would ultimately give way to their separation – involved a definite turning point in Bulwer-Lytton's life. In his estimation, Rosina suffered a transformation, becoming easily prone to overreact and behave whimsically, probably as a result of negligence, as her husband was often overwhelmed with work and did not pay her the attention she thought she deserved. Conversely, Elizabeth Barbara's devotion for her youngest son remained constant, perhaps only troubled during the years of his marriage to Rosina, and her affection grew fonder once the separation was agreed. In this respect, according to David Lytton Cobbold, in her early twenties, Rosina Wheeler was presumed to be “warmed hearted, sensitive, and generous to a fault [...] possibly too apt to feel keenly neglect or coldness, but ever ready to forgive even the most unpardonable offences.”⁵⁴ However, Rosina's sensitiveness at a young age sharply contrasted with her continuous defamation of her former husband, Bulwer-Lytton, later in life, to the extent of even daring to expose his conduct towards her when he was to address his voters at a public meeting in Hertford, which would ultimately result in Rosina's enclosure in a lunatic asylum. This dual personality that apparently characterised Rosina's character is literally canalised in the portrayal of two female characters in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, insofar as the Greek heroine, Ione, stands in sharp contrast with the patrician Julia from Rome. Both women are in love with Glaucus and wish to win his love, but Glaucus only feels attracted towards Ione, as he immediately identifies her as his compatriot, whereas he regards Julia's ambition and vehemence as values totally alien to those belonging to his noble nation. Nonetheless, Glaucus' clear perception is threatened by Julia's intention to use a philtre so as to oblige him to see her in a different way, and this manipulation of Glaucus' perception is intended to blur the distinction that he is able to notice between the pious Ione and the irreverent Julia.

Bulwer-Lytton's changing consideration towards his wife Rosina, and her presumed transformation, from meekness to rebelliousness, bears some resemblance with that of Madeline in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” inasmuch as Madeline's

⁵⁴ David Lytton Cobbold. *A Blighted Marriage: The Life of Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, Irish Beauty, Satirist and Tormented Victorian Wife*. (Knebworth: Knebworth House, 1999): 2.

initial discreet, but latent, presence ostensibly differs from her enraged insanity later on, as she rises from her coffin and attacks her brother in utter revenge. Accordingly, in the case of Poe, this female duality is symbolised through Madeline's transformation, which presents important similarities with some women from the Allan family, mainly Frances and Louisa Allan, especially taking into consideration that, from Poe's perspective, they represented different prototypes of femininity. Poe's troublesome relationship with John Allan stood in sharp contrast with the fact that he, as opposed to his foster father, always remained on everlasting affectionate terms with Frances Allan. As a result of his wife's illness, John Allan hoped that moving to Moldavia would greatly improve her health, as she had begun to show signs of consumption in England, but Frances Allan would inevitably die in Moldavia at the age of forty-four. The fragility and invalidism that characterised her for years are reminiscent of those of Madeline and her cataleptic state in Poe's tale. Likewise, as happens to the narrator, who is requested to visit his friend Roderick and his ill sister Madeline at the House of Usher, the fatal illness befalling Frances at the time also served the purpose of summoning Poe back to Moldavia to join his foster family in the final days of her illness. Nonetheless, Poe was unable to arrive at Moldavia until the night after her burial, and having reached Moldavia knowing that his foster mother had died in his absence, he felt overwhelmed by grief and guilt at the thought of having deserted her, while his guilt was also coupled with that of his foster father, who regretted having disregarded his late wife and having been unfaithful to her. This mutual sense of guilt contributed to improving the relation between foster father and foster son even if only for a short period of time.

Owing to Poe's subsequent prolonged absence from Moldavia and his dissolute behaviour, the relationship between John Allan and Poe began to deteriorate again until Poe realised that his presence in Moldavia was simply unwanted, especially when John Allan got married again and fathered a new family with his second wife, Louisa Gabriella. The personality of John Allan's second wife differed greatly from that of Frances Allan, and her relationship with Poe was also ostensibly unlike. Aware of her husband's increasingly distant behaviour towards his foster son, Louisa took an active role in excluding Poe from the Allan household. In fact, according to Dawn Sova, Poe

went so far as to blame her for increasing John Allan's animosity toward him, thereby eliminating all possibility of naming him his successor.⁵⁵ For this reason, Poe's consideration of Louisa would sharply clash with his kind memories of his foster mother, Frances Allan, since, if the latter had aptly played her role as an 'angel of the house' and had contributed to improving the relation between foster father and foster son, Louisa's presence definitely separated Poe from John Allan. This symbolic transformation of the figure of his foster mother – from Frances Allan to Louisa Gabriella – bears resemblance with some of Poe's tales featuring cases of 'metempsychosis,'⁵⁶ which can be metaphorically applied to the character of Madeline in "The Fall of the House of Usher," inasmuch as she transforms from a quiet to an enraged woman. In a literal sense, however, some of Poe's tales present explicit examples of 'metempsychosis,' as is the case of the female figures in tales such as "Morella" (1835) and "Ligeia" (1845), since, in these narratives, the narrator bears witness to the heroines' transformation from angelic to enraged versions of themselves.

As Karen Weekes points out, some similarities have been established between the appearance of some of Poe's heroines and the descriptions of real women in his life.⁵⁷ The unexpected capacities of these heroines beyond the grave indicate their role as emotional catalysts for the male narrators, since, in Poe's psyche, Frances Allan and Louisa Allan would stand for two differing female ideals, transforming from 'angels of the house' into 'fallen women,' and re-enacting this process in different tales. In this respect, drawing further on Karen Weekes, in Poe's tales, "once a woman steps out of the narrow boundaries of the stereotypical feminine role, she is reviled rather than revered."⁵⁸ Thus, Madeline's metempsychosis or transformation from a silent presence to an enraged female underlines Poe's differing approach towards Frances and Louisa at

⁵⁵ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 8.

⁵⁶ In classical Greek philosophy, the term 'metempsychosis' refers to the transmigration of the soul or the reincarnation after death. In some of Poe's tales featuring female characters, the narrator bears witness to the death of a woman, who, eventually, comes back to life as reincarnated in another woman.

⁵⁷ Karen Weekes. "Poe's Feminine Ideal." (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 160.

⁵⁸ Karen Weekes. "Poe's Feminine Ideal." (Kevin J. Hayes. Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 154.

this stage of his life. Likewise, Madeline's conversion also responds to Poe's fictionalisation of Frances Allan's everlasting presence, even after her death, owing to a sense of guiltiness on behalf of John Allan and Poe, which may have contributed to her metaphorical return through remorse and anger. This transformation is thus enacted in "The Fall of the House of Usher," as Madeline is first perceived as a shadow that passes slowly through the chamber once Roderick alludes to her, but her violent rise underscores her increasing latent power and influence, ultimately anticipating the destruction of the house. Madeline's rise thus responds to Roderick's sense of guilt at having entombed her alive, in analogy with the fact that Frances Allan's death also contributed to awakening the Allans' sense of guilt, especially owing to the troublesome relation between John Allan and Poe, as well as John Allan's infidelities and disrespect towards her, which may have caused the worsening of her illness and her eventual death.

The demise of the aging patriarch, decadence, and the end of a life stage

Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* are fictionalisations of the end of an era, and from a biographical perspective, they also sanction the culmination of a stage in the life of their respective authors. This sense of termination is ultimately denoted in both narratives by means of the aging process and ultimate death of the figure of a patriarch, as is the case of Roderick Usher in Poe's tale and Arbaces in Bulwer-Lytton's novel. Drawing on a biographical interpretation, the demise of these patriarchs in these narratives also represents metaphorical deaths in the lives of the authors, as they felt obliged to leave their pasts behind and start a new phase, since Poe felt excluded from the Allan household and Bulwer-Lytton separated from his wife. In this respect, these fictions also reflect the personal processes of aging of both authors and their entrance upon a new stage of their lives. Likewise, the death of a patriarchal figure in these fictions is symbolised through the architectural collapse of the House of Usher and the destruction of the city of Pompeii through the eruption of the volcano, which metaphorically sanction the debacle of the Ushers – and by extension, of the Allans – and of Pompeii –

insofar as it bore witness to the disruption of Bulwer-Lytton's marriage in the course of his journey to the ruins of the city with his wife.

In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the narrator's arrival at the house to visit his ill friend Roderick brings to mind Poe's final visit to Moldavia to visit John Allan in his last days of life. When John Allan was fifty-four years of age, he suffered from dropsy, was confined to an armchair, and leant on a cane, as his health progressively worsened. According to biographer Kenneth Silverman, on learning about John Allan's illness, Poe attempted to visit him in Moldavia, but, John Allan's second wife, Louisa Gabriella, had turned John Allan against his foster son. In fact, as biographer Kenneth Silverman recounts, when Poe arrived at Moldavia, Louisa tried to prevent him from going upstairs to Allan's bedroom, and even though she was unsuccessful, when John Allan saw Poe, his immediate reaction was to raise his cane as if to strike him and command him to leave. As it finally turned out, that was the last time that Poe ever saw his foster father, as he died only one month after this final visit.⁵⁹

John Allan's condition and his remarkably aged appearance are significantly remindful of those of Roderick Usher in Poe's tale, especially when the narrator eventually sets eyes on his old friend after a long time, and describes him in the following terms:

Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid; [...] hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity [...]. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much change that I doubted to whom I spoke.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 97.

⁶⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Fall of the House of Usher." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 401-402.

Roderick's altered physical appearance also goes hand-in-hand with his eccentricity to the extent that the narrator finds it hard to recognise in him the companion of his youth. The accurate description of Roderick is significantly reminiscent of that of Poe's last visit to his foster father in Moldavia, soon before he died, since the change in John Allan's appearance and his strange ways at dismissing Poe from his presence are remindful of Roderick's aged condition and his unconventional ways during the narrator's stay in his house. Likewise, given the fact that they were companions in their youth, Roderick's premature process of aging inevitably brings to the narrator's mind his own process of growing aged. Hence, John Allan's aging and his eventual death would also unleash Poe's process of aging, insofar as John Allan was his foster father, while his eventual realisation of his exclusion from the Allan household would gradually fuel his aging, since, at an advanced age, Poe realised that his prospects of becoming heir to the Allans were shattered and had to start from anew on his own using his own resources.

Roderick's description as a decadent hero also matches that of Arbaces in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, who is characterised as a malevolent Egyptian priest, endowed with the power of the evil eye, who sets eyes on Ione, and turns into Glaucus' antagonist. Nonetheless, his power is in decline as his ongoing process of aging shows:

Around the brows the skin was puckered into a web of deep and intricate wrinkles – the eyes, ark and small, rolled in a muddy and yellow orbit – the nose, short yet coarse, was distended at the nostrils like a satyr's – and the thick but pallid lips, the high cheek-bones, the livid and motley hues that struggled through the parchment skin, completed a countenance which none could behold without repugnance, and few without terror and distrust.⁶¹

As the quotations above suggest, both Arbaces and Roderick Usher are presented as remarkably aged, since a significant emphasis is placed on their aging traits, such as their greyish or thinning hair, and their wrinkled face. Nonetheless, despite their fragile appearance, both are also endowed with power and skills, since Arbaces is an Egyptian

⁶¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 36.

priest – characterised as authoritative and malevolent – that holds his command over his disciples through fear and black magic, while Roderick Usher is an outstanding artist and musician, with an acute sensitiveness towards aesthetics, who rules over his manor estate. In spite of their authority as eminent patriarchal figures, both Arbaces and Roderick begin to show signs of weakness, and they undergo a gradual process of deterioration. In fact, they need to resort to others as they gradually become dependent, since Arbaces needs his community of followers to exert his power over the Pompeian population, and Roderick Usher requests the presence of the narrator during his last days of existence. In both cases, these decadent heroes are ultimately destroyed by the action of nature, since Arbaces perishes as a consequence of the eruption of Vesuvius, while Roderick Usher vanishes when his house is swallowed by the deep tarn that surrounds the mansion of the Ushers. The end of both Roderick Usher and Arbaces is anticipated through their process of aging, which, in turn, becomes symptomatic of a pervasive atmosphere of closure and termination that sanctions the end of an era. This imminent dissolution is symbolised through the fissure heralding the fall of the House of Usher, or the eruption of ancestral Vesuvius in Pompeii, which is described in the following quotations from the texts in a significantly similar manner:

Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure, of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base.⁶²

* * *

The lightning, as if caught by the metal, lingered an instant on the Imperial Statue – then shivered bronze and column! Down fell the ruin, echoing along the street, and riving the solid pavement where it crashed! The prophecy of the stars was fulfilled!

⁶² Edgar Allan Poe. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. II: Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 400.

The sound – the shock, stunned the Athenian for several moments. When he recovered, the light still illuminated the scene – the earth still slid and trembled beneath!⁶³

The destruction of the House of Usher and of the city of Pompeii in classical times underpins the overwhelming sense of decadence that pervades Poe's tale as well as Bulwer-Lytton's novel. According to Richard Gilman, decadence refers to an assumed decay in morals, standards, and beliefs at governing among the members of the elite, which precedes the inevitable dissolution of a society, while, within the cultural decadent movement of the *fin de siècle*, as opposed to Romantics, who defended a naïve view of nature, the decadents valued artifice over nature, sophistication, and the rejection of progress.⁶⁴ Drawing on this notion of decadence as the end of a period, which necessarily entangles with images of excess and degeneracy, Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" addresses the taboo of incest, which, according to Irving H. Buchen, lies at the heart of the concept of decadence, as it dramatizes the falling away from newness to sameness.⁶⁵ In this respect, Roderick Usher's implicit incestuous relation with his twin sister, Madeline, can be interpreted as his final effort to ensure the continuity of his race. From a biographical perspective, as Poe noticed he was being gradually drawn away from the Allans, he married his cousin Virginia, thus seeming to hold on to the old ways to preserve his own origins and marry someone from his own lineage and condition. Nevertheless, as happens in his tale, like that of the Ushers, Poe's ancestry was also doomed to extinction, as Poe and Virginia would never have offspring.

Conversely, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Egyptian Arbaces sets his malevolent eyes on Ione, Greek in origin, and thus, belonging to a different lineage, to reinvigorate his line and guarantee the persistence of his ancestry in time. In this respect, according to Mary L. Gordon, the permanence of aristocracy in Pompeii was somehow conditioned by the immigration of wealthy and noble families

⁶³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Last Days of Pompeii*. (Holicong, Pennsylvania: Wildside Press, 2003): 349.

⁶⁴ Richard Gilman. *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979).

⁶⁵ Irving H. Buchen. "Decadence as Blasphemy." (*Modern Language Studies* 2.1. Winter 1972): 17.

from commercial cities so that they could be constantly recruited by new blood,⁶⁶ thus favouring miscegenation as opposed to endogamy so as to ensure the permanence of the aristocratic classes, even though Arbaces never achieves his purpose, and therefore, his lineage falls into oblivion. By contrast, even though Glaucus has the chance to marry a patrician, he eventually marries someone from his own Greek origin and returns to his homeland to start a new life. In this respect, it can be claimed that his novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* underscores Bulwer-Lytton's need to resort to fiction to make amends for what he perceived as his own mistake in real life, thus allowing the hero to marry someone from his own lineage and discounting marriage to someone from outside, as opposed to what he had done. In fact, upon marrying Rosina, Bulwer-Lytton had married someone outside his aristocratic circle, and had an heir as a result, even though the termination of this union eventually ingratiated him again with his mother, and allowed him to re-join his family as well as his aristocratic lineage.

Despite having undergone similar experiences, falling in and out of favour with their respective families, the prospects awaiting both authors were significantly different. Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" can be interpreted as Poe's elegy as well as homage to his foster family, the Allans, and especially, to John and Frances Allan. Not only did the demise of Frances Allan in 1829 and of John Allan in 1834 sanction Poe's debarment from those who had been his family up to then, but it also involved a significant turning-point which would have an enormous effect on the rest of his life. As a matter of fact, John Allan's death truly propelled Poe into maturity and adulthood, having to accept the responsibilities he had so far tried to avoid, since to use Kenneth Silverman's words in this respect, Poe "might now continue to cry out that he was perishing for want of aid, but no John Allan would appear to upbraid him for evasion, irresponsibility, and disrespect, or to supply school books or mourning clothes or eight or ten dollars for a boarding house."⁶⁷ Despite their differences, so far Poe had been able to resort to his foster father when he was in need of help. But after John Allan's demise, Poe was inevitably left alone to face his fate and, forced to leave his

⁶⁶ Mary L. Gordon. "The Ordo of Pompeii." (*The Journal of Roman Studies* 17. 1927): 175-176.

⁶⁷ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: The Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1992): 99.

prospects of becoming an heir, was caught totally unprepared to start anew at a comparatively advanced age. In contrast, for Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii* reflected the end of his marriage to Rosina and the need to accept his responsibilities as heir to the Lytton family, but it also marked a turning-point that drew him into his own adulthood in an overtly positive way. When his marriage to Rosina came to an end, he was welcomed back to the family by his mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, while, in spite of the turbulent relationship with his wife, Bulwer-Lytton had managed to form a family of his own, and having been accepted into his own lineage again, and having fathered an heir of his own, Bulwer-Lytton could envision the rest of his life as a period when he could accomplish the final objective of being raised to the peerage, and thus, fulfil his duty as heir to the Lytton family.

* * *

The connection that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe established with their respective family manors, Knebworth House and Moldavia, underlined the discontinuous relation that they maintained with their families, inasmuch as the family stately home of privileged households was often taken to refer to a particular lineage in Victorian times. The fictions “The Fall of the House of Usher” and *The Last Days of Pompeii* – insofar as they present the collapse of an architectural structure, as is the case of the House of Usher and of the temple of Arbaces – also recount the debacle of the family of the Ushers and the city of Pompeii as a result of decadence and moral fall, giving shape to literary displays of Victorian apocalypticism. The pervasive atmosphere of doom and closure that pervades the House of Usher as well as the classical city of Pompeii is reified through the prevalence of endogamy in order to ensure the continuation of a family or a social group that are condemned to extinction. Drawing on a biographical interpretation of his tale “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Poe wrote an elegy to the debacle of his foster family, the Allans, and especially, of the aging process and ultimate death without progeny of his foster parents, John and Frances Allan. Likewise, Poe’s own marriage to his cousin Virginia brings to the fore Poe’s concern about

endogamy and the end of a lineage, as their marriage did not produce any offspring, as is also the case of Roderick and Madeline Usher in the tale. Through his novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Bulwer-Lytton also wrote an elegy to the end of his marriage to Rosina, and through writing his fiction, he tried to make amends for the mistake he made in choosing his wife against his mother's wise advice. In the novel, the Greek hero, Glaucus, falls in love with his compatriot, Ione, and rejects the advances of a Roman pretender, Julia, in a display of the author's belief in marrying one's equal, as opposed to his fatal choice of Rosina as his wife.

Given the emphasis placed on architectural constructions in both narratives, it is possible to establish a parallelism between the acts of constructing and deconstructing architectural structures, as well as between writing and un-writing texts, as reflected by the rise and fall of the House of Usher and the temple of Arbaces recounted in the respective fictions of Poe and Bulwer-Lytton. Likewise, as the authors wrote their fictions about architectural structures and family lineages, their texts were also suggestive of the literal as well as metaphorical edification and debacle of their family manors, Moldavia and Knebworth. Poe would always associate Moldavia with the Allans, while their intermittent visits and ultimate exclusion from the house would also underpin his discontinuous relationship and eventual barring from the Allan household. With regard to Bulwer-Lytton's family manor, Knebworth House, he would spend longer periods of time in his family home during his childhood and in his old age, hence Knebworth would become a personification of his family lineage, and especially, of his mother, but also a symbolic container of time. In this respect, for Bulwer-Lytton, Knebworth House turned into 'palimpsest' of texts written during centuries, as well as a 'chronotope' that joined space and time, and awakened memories from his childhood and youth in his old age.

These fictions also portray an impending sense of doom through the presence of the fissure that destabilises the House of Usher and the eruption of the volcano that produces intermittent earthquakes in the city of Pompeii. This menacing presence, which foretells the ultimate destruction of the House of Usher and of the city of Pompeii, for the most part, responds to a moral sin involving the Ushers and the citizens

of Pompeii, through the haunting taboo of incest – as a result of taking endogamy too far – and through paganism as represented by Arbaces' black magic. This fall from grace that is suggested in both fictions also underscores significant biographical facts on behalf of the authors, taking into consideration that Poe's tale is an elegy to the Allan family, and Bulwer-Lytton's novel is an elegy to his marriage to Rosina. Through the portrayal of Roderick Usher, Poe suggested John Allan's dark secret of having been unfaithful to his wife, while through the depiction of Madeline, Poe symbolised Frances Allan's illness and ultimate death, whereas in Madeline's symbolic resurrection as an infuriated fallen woman, Poe symbolised John Allan's guilty feelings at having disregarded his wife and Poe's own remorse for having abandoned her for too long. In his novel, Bulwer-Lytton portrayed the love triangle of Glaucus, Ione and Julia, as well as that of Glaucus, Julia and Arbaces, which ultimately echoes the ghost of infidelity that threatened to disrupt his marriage in the course of the journey that Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina made to Italy.

Finally, the ultimate collapse of the architectural structures in the narratives is particularly symbolised by means of the death of the figure of an aging patriarch, as is the case of Roderick Usher and Arbaces. In the emphasis that the narrator draws on Roderick Usher's aged and fragile condition after their last encounter bears resemblance with Poe's last visit to John Allan in Moldavia on account of his illness. The death of the patriarch of the Allans ultimately sanctioned Poe's exclusion from the Allan household, in analogy with Roderick's demise, which ratifies the end of the Usher family as well as the culmination of the narrator's connection with the Ushers. Conversely, though, the death of Arbaces in Bulwer-Lytton's novel saves the love of Glaucus and Ione, who finally manage to escape from Pompeii and start a new life in Greece. The disparate conclusions to which both narratives come underscore the authors' different attitude toward this stage of their life, and the effect this would have on the way they approached their process of aging. The death of John Allan and Poe's exclusion from the Allan household would oblige Poe to start anew at a considerably advanced age of his life, thus feeling prematurely aged on leaving behind the prospects he had coveted during most of his youth. In contrast, when Bulwer-Lytton separated

from Rosina, his relationship with his mother improved considerably and became even closer, while, playing the role of the prodigal son, Bulwer-Lytton would face his duty of being heir to the Lyttons and face his process of aging as an alluring stage of life during which he would play the role he had been assigned since he was a child.

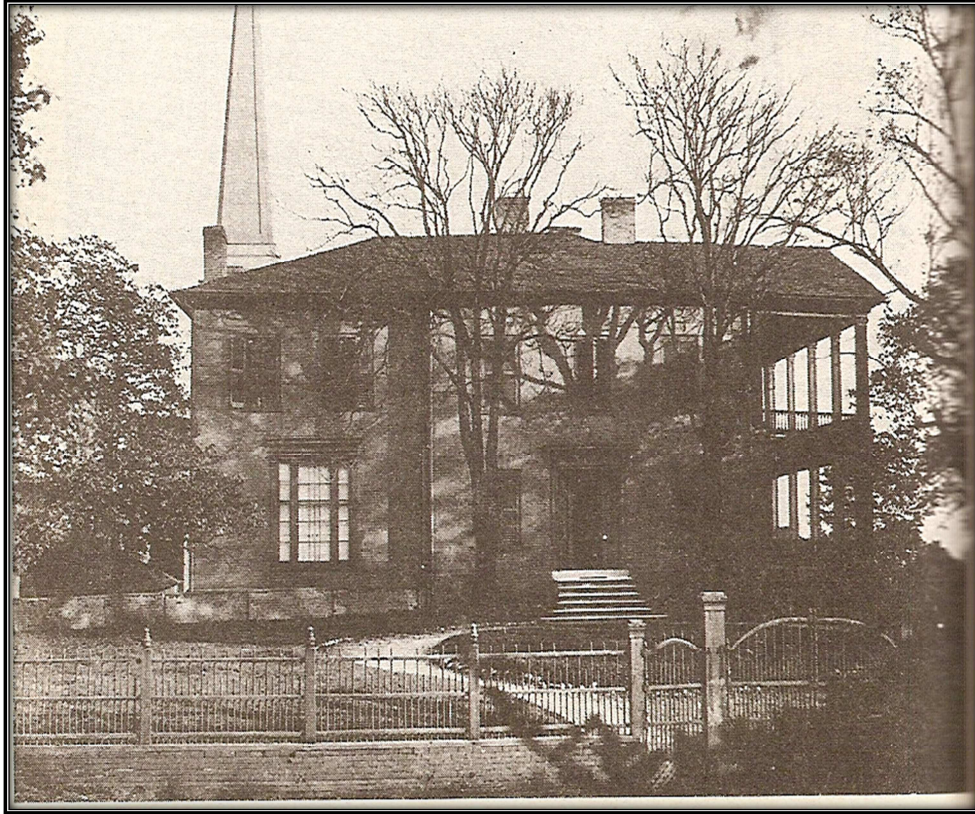


Figure 8 - Photograph of Moldavia at the Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

Taken from: Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991): 246.

Chapter Six

Domesticity, Gender Disruptions, and Parenthood in *The Caxtons* and “The Black Cat”

When Bulwer-Lytton published the first novel of his domestic trilogy in 1849 under the title of *The Caxtons*, he was well over forty years old. In the course of the preceding years, which for the most part marked his entrance into maturity, he had to bear a series of tragic events that would exert an important influence over the remaining days of his life. Among these events were the tempestuous aftermath following the collapse of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler; the demise of his beloved mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, to whom he had always been particularly devoted; and, most unexpectedly, the deep grief at the premature death of his daughter Emily Lytton when she was only nineteen years of age. Nonetheless, despite these appalling incidents that befell Bulwer-Lytton at the time, *The Caxtons* would unpredictably come to be considered one of his most optimistic novels, as if Bulwer-Lytton was trying to retreat into fiction in order to create the blissful picture of domestic life that had been bitterly denied him.

Upon envisioning *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton stated in the preface to the novel that he intended to devote himself to “the completion of a simple family picture.”¹ As an author, he had always been keen to disclose the reasons that gave rise to a new novel, and on this particular occasion, he clearly stated his intention to focus on issues pertaining to domesticity and family life. To use his words, in his domestic novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton chose to portray amiable characters and ordinary life in addition to extolling “common household affections [and] the sympathies of the human

¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Preface.” (*The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 3.

heart.”² In clear contrast with preceding novels – which had for the most part dwelled upon the silver-fork genre, crime, and historical fiction – Bulwer-Lytton established an important rupture with the past as he busied himself with the creation of a domestic trilogy that bore little resemblance to anything he had produced so far.

At this stage, Bulwer-Lytton grieved with anger and guilt at the tragic picture his own family presented, while struggling to imagine a brighter picture of what could have been his projected life in domesticity. After the publication of his sensation novel *Lucretia* in 1846, his Caxton trilogy extended for nearly a decade, surely accounting for the kind of domestic life he would have liked to have had himself, and that he also projected for his young son Robert. In this sense, Bulwer-Lytton felt that his personal anxieties regarding his family had to be contained – anxieties that were subdued, in the event, through the creation of his domestic novel. Hence, in spite of its generally cordial tone, *The Caxtons* unveils Bulwer-Lytton’s way to conciliate his personal crisis at the time owing to the tragic circumstances that had recently befallen him.

In a final analysis, Bulwer-Lytton’s domestic novel reveals the author’s process of aging as a result of his experiences in the domestic context as a husband, and in particular, as a father, aiming to accomplish a twofold purpose. It was envisioned both as a way to escape from the bleak picture his own family presented at the time, as well as a cathartic experience revealing Bulwer-Lytton’s anxieties about family life. Hence, it involved an attempt to retreat from the tragic experiences he had recently undergone in the family domain, as well as an act of subtle exposure of those domestic anxieties that were still haunting him. In this sense, the narrative framework of *The Caxtons* clearly underlines the Victorian ideology of hallowed domesticity, and yet, as Peter Sinnema contends, at the core of Bulwer-Lytton’s domestic novel lies “the promise of a resolution to various anxieties,”³ in particular related to issues relevant to the author’s life, as well as his contemporary society, as is the case with Victorian conceptualisations

² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Preface.” (*The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 3.

³ Peter Sinnema. “Between Men: Reading the Caxton Trilogy as Domestic Fiction.” (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 184.

of masculinity and the changes arising from the rise of the 'new woman' in the mid-nineteenth-century, which significantly conditioned the way Bulwer-Lytton approached aging.

In resemblance with the bleak picture characterising Bulwer-Lytton's household when he was in his mid-forties, when Poe was scarcely in his mid-thirties, he was also compelled to bear one of the most tragic episodes that was to befall his family. His marriage to his cousin, Virginia Clemm, had been a matter of much personal concern and anxiety from its onset. Poe's long-lasting apprehension, on account of his wife's outstanding young age, even obliged him to keep their marriage secret and to lie about Virginia's actual age so as to avoid any possible scandal. Nonetheless, precisely because of his wife's youthful looks and becoming chubbiness, Poe could have never expected the disgrace that was soon to take place in their home. At the time when Virginia had turned twenty years of age, while she was playing the piano to amuse her family, a blood vessel in her throat broke and blood began to spurt from her mouth. This dramatic event marked the anguishing decline of Virginia's poor health, while her husband, from then onwards, lived in constant fear of her death, as he had to witness, at all times, the wasting process that was consuming his young wife.

To make things even worse, it was in the middle of an acute financial strain in the family that Virginia began to show obvious signs of having contracted tuberculosis, as she had difficulty in breathing and coughed profusely, while she was also losing weight and experiencing extreme fatigue. Poe had to struggle hard to make ends meet, and in consequence, the anxiety aroused in him on witnessing his wife in constant suffering was further augmented by his incapacity to provide his family with some financial comfort that would help ease their situation. Given Poe's susceptible nature, he felt incapable of coping with such emotional strain and he began to drink regularly in an attempt to escape the dreary reality in which he was trapped. Given his vulnerable disposition, Poe seemed unable to take control of the situation and felt overwhelmed on contemplating the bleak future that appeared to be awaiting them. Even if he was the man of the family at the time, as he lived with his wife Virginia and her mother Maria, Poe could hardly be considered to fulfil his assumed role as the family's breadwinner.

His prospects to become a successful owner of his own magazine repeatedly failed, as his erratic behaviour worsened owing to his unrelenting intemperance. In reality, in the Poe household, it was rather Poe's mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, who, through her characteristic strong will and arduous work, seemed to take a more responsible and active role in providing the family with a means of survival, both through her sewing and by begging her neighbours for some food or clothing that would alleviate her family's miserable condition.

It was in the midst of this unwelcoming situation in his home that Poe created his domestic tale "The Black Cat" (1843), whose ultimate purpose was, according to the narrator of the story, "to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events."⁴ Nevertheless, far from the bright and idealised picture in the home that was being promoted through the discourse of domesticity prevailing at the time, most of Poe's domestic tales rather portray the home as a nightmarish scenario in which conflicts amongst the different family members are endemic. In this respect, "The Black Cat" depicts how the apparently blissful existence of a childless couple ends in tragedy when the husband gives himself over to drinking and the wife seems fonder of her cat than of her own husband. To use Leland Person's words, in Poe's tale "The Black Cat," not only does the narrator undergo a metamorphosis within the domestic sphere, but actually, his transformation from a meek companion into a violent husband "seems a product of that [same] sphere and its claustrophobic limitations."⁵ In this sense, "The Black Cat" follows the trace of other tales in which the narrator feels overwhelmed by the constraints of a tedious domestic life. As a case in point, Poe's earlier tale, "Loss of Breath" (1832), portrays the peaceful existence of a newly-married couple up to the moment when the husband discovers his wife has been unfaithful to him, and as a result of his continuous shouts censuring her behaviour, he loses his breath, his weak condition being taken as a clear sign of

⁴ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Black Cat." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches, 1843-1849*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 849.

⁵ Leland S. Person. "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions." (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 134.

domestic disempowerment. Likewise, in the same year that “The Black Cat” was published, another of Poe’s well-known tales of domesticity saw the light of day under the title of “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), in which, overwhelmed by his oppressive coexistence with an old man and feeling himself to be under his constant supervision, the narrator decides to kill his old companion in order to get rid of his symbolically-omnipresent evil eye.

All of these tales challenge the image of the home, for the most part prevailing at the time, as an idealised and peaceful shelter to take refuge from the hectic life outside. In fact, Poe’s tale, “The Black Cat,” presents a very different picture and acquires special relevance in this respect as it was published at a specific turning-point in Poe’s marriage. When his wife fell critically ill, Poe, as a husband, perceived that his most terrible anxieties about domestic life, no matter how hard he tried to repress them, were inevitably coming to the fore. “The Black Cat” can thus be considered Poe’s cathartic attempt to retreat into fiction so as to give free vent to the anxieties that were undermining his domestic life at the time. In this sense, the tale acquires a significantly confessional tone as the narrator feels the need to give voice to his terrible predicament arising from the stifling domestic environment in which he feels trapped. Poe’s most immediate anxieties at the time were obviously Virginia’s delicate condition and their desperate economic situation. Nonetheless, there were other less obvious anxieties with regard to his family situation that had long been befalling Poe. Given his condition as an orphan on perpetually bad terms with his foster father, John Allan, Poe envisaged his marriage to Virginia as the much-awaited promise for a necessarily brighter future. In his quest for happiness, Poe’s ambition was to have a family of his own. However, his aspirations ultimately came to no end as his life as a married man seemed far from bringing him the peace of mind that he had desperately coveted. In truth, Poe’s identity on his way towards later aging was necessarily conditioned by haunting fears of emasculation and disempowerment as a result of his idiosyncratic condition within his household and the role he was required to play in it as a family man.

The analysis of *The Caxtons* and “The Black Cat” brings to the fore issues related to the process of male aging and how this process clashes with prevailing

notions of masculinity, as male characters in these domestic fictions undergo processes of emasculation and masculinisation. In his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned the blissful domestic life that he was deprived of in the course of his marriage, while he also paid homage to the figure of his late daughter, Emily Lytton, and tried to fictionalise the precepts of his fatherly guidance addressed to his son, Robert. Likewise, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Pisistratus Caxton, is exposed to different prototypes of masculinity, as exemplified by his male relatives – mostly his father as a man of letters, his uncle Roland as a soldier, and his uncle Jack as a businessman – as was also the case of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe, inasmuch as their male relatives also personified different types of masculinities as defined by their respective professions. The figure of the writer as embodied by Augustine Caxton in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and of the narrator in Poe's tale – as counterparts of the authors – clash with emergent conceptualisations of masculinity that prevailed at the time, as these males are mostly presented as trapped in the domestic scenario to fulfil their tasks. Likewise, in these domestic fictions, family pets, such as cats and dogs, play the role of catalysts of domesticity, as male characters – and by extension, the authors themselves – associate them with their wives and their life in domesticity.

Fear of male aging: emasculation, masculinities, and masculinisation

Bulwer-Lytton envisioned his domestic novel *The Caxtons* as a bright response to an obscure period of significant personal turmoil in his family life. Over the span of a few years, Bulwer-Lytton was required to bear tragic episodes which involved important turning-points in his life that had an important effect on his process of aging. Owing to the deaths of his beloved mother and his daughter, as well as the failure of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler, in a short period of time he realised that he was no longer a son or a husband. Moreover, his lifetime animosity towards his wife perpetually reminded him that his final choice to marry Rosina, against his mother's wishes, was one of the greatest mistakes he had ever made. All these changes inevitably disrupted Bulwer-Lytton's internalized ideal of domesticity and family life. Deprived of his identity as a family man – as a father, a son, and a husband – he began to face a period of gradual

weakening and increasing disempowerment. In this sense, given the fact that his novel *The Caxtons* depicts the sort of family life that he had been denied bitterly, it also responds to Bulwer-Lytton's reaffirmed belief in the values of family and domesticity. Likewise, it also stands as Bulwer-Lytton's response to a critical moment in his life which underlines the haunting threat of emasculation, as well as his need for readjustment to new ways of masculinity.

The narrative of *The Caxtons* unfolds the everyday life of a married couple, Augustine and Kitty Caxton, following the birth of their only son, Pisistratus. Even though it is the young Pisistratus who narrates the story, given the age Bulwer-Lytton was at the time and the significant resemblance they present, it is likely that Bulwer-Lytton found himself identified with the character of Augustine Caxton, thus adopting the role of a fatherly figure. As a keen scholar, Augustine Caxton devotes his whole life to study, and also remains, for the most part, detached from worldly affairs and family matters. As a father, he believes he rules over his home, and yet he remains deeply committed to his wife Kitty, who, despite her docile appearance, seems to exert an important influence on her husband. Likewise, as Bulwer-Lytton's own attitude towards his children, Augustine Caxton does not behave particularly affectionately towards his son Pisistratus, since, apparently, Augustine seems more concerned to achieve his own lifetime ambition, namely, to reach closure in his great philosophical treatise.

Given his occupation as a scholar, Augustine Caxton seems unaware of the effects of aging, and he faces this stage rather as the accomplishment of his ultimate goal in life, which is to publish the book that has taken him a lifetime to complete. In contrast with Augustine Caxton's general unconcern about aging, some of his contemporaries in Bulwer-Lytton's novel show an utter dread for the aging process and its expected haunting effects. As a case in point, Augustine Caxton meets an old friend, Sir Sedley Beadesert, who achieved some fame in youth for his good looks and his inherent talent at socialising. Given his condition as a former dandy in youth, Sir Sedley Beadesert arises as an aged *alter ego* of the character of Pelham in Bulwer-Lytton's earlier novel, who feels unable to accept his aging process, since those values in which

he has habitually taken pride are, mostly, exclusively associated with youth. It is in the following way that Sir Sedley Beaudesert reveals his fears about old age:

I do dread to be old. All the joys of my life have been the joys of youth. I have had so exquisite a pleasure in the mere sense of living, that old age, as it comes near, terrifies me by its dull eyes and grey hairs. I have lived the life of a butterfly. Summer is over, and I see my flowers withering; and my wings are chilled by the first airs of winter. Yes, I envy Trevanion; for, in public life, no man is ever young; and, while he can work, he is never old.⁶

Given Bulwer-Lytton's intellectual persuasion, as well as his political responsibilities, he would undoubtedly agree with Sir Sedley Beaudesert's final words when he states that a man who keeps on working never really grows old. Nonetheless, these reflections upon old age somehow unveil Bulwer-Lytton's anxieties about his own process of aging, as Sir Sedley Beaudesert emphasises the decline of physical vigour and youthful appearance that old age brings about. As an aged version of the fictionalised character of his youth, Henry Pelham, in *Pelham* (1828), through the creation of Sir Sedley Beaudesert in *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton might well have been remembering his dandified youth as an admirer of Lord Byron and as a great favourite of female socialites like Lady Caroline Lamb.

According to Christopher Lane, under the dandified character of Henry Pelham in Bulwer-Lytton's novel of his youth, there always seemed to lurk the spectre of effeminacy.⁷ In this respect, at the time, Bulwer-Lytton had to bear harsh criticism for having endowed his Pelham with too many effeminate traits, which, for the most part, highlighted the dandified qualities of the protagonist. Correspondingly, in subsequent editions of his silver-fork novel, Bulwer-Lytton felt the need to exorcise these veiled references to effeminacy, ultimately turning Henry Pelham into a married man, and thus, transforming the aesthetics of dandyism in the novel into moralistic displays with an edifying purpose behind. Bulwer-Lytton's reaction towards criticism of his dandified

⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 132.

⁷ Christopher Lane. "The Spectre of Effeminacy in Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*." (*The Burdens of Intimacy: Psychoanalysis and Victorian Masculinity*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999): 45-72.

hero underscored a dilemma between two forces which Christopher Lane interprets as being due, on the one hand, to Bulwer-Lytton's repression of Pelham's effeminate traits in the novel – in clear reference to Sigmund Freud's notion of 'repression' – and, on the other hand, to Bulwer-Lytton's incitement to the discourse of effeminacy, given these veiled references in the novel – in clear reference to Michel Foucault's notion of 'discourse.' Nonetheless, Lane reaches the conclusion that, despite Bulwer-Lytton's efforts to minimise the effeminate traits characterising his hero, these excisions seem insufficiently effective to cause them to be eradicated, since they remain latent in the novel and constantly return as if they were instances of memory and trauma.

If in Bulwer-Lytton's novel of youth seemed to lurk the spectre of effeminacy, it can be argued that in *The Caxtons* lurks the spectre of emasculation. After his traumatic separation from his wife Rosina, Bulwer-Lytton's personal crisis at the time underscored the fear of emasculation, which also seemed to mark his gradual passage over the threshold of aging. If in his novel *Pelham*, Bulwer-Lytton tried to remodel his hero in order to defy the haunting menace of effeminacy, in his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to align self-mastery with a particular kind of masculinity with a view to defying emasculation upon the advent of later aging. Nonetheless, as also happens in his novel *Pelham*, Bulwer-Lytton's attempts at hiding, or even, repressing the spectre of emasculation rather gives way to the invocation of this discourse. As an eminently domestic novel that extols masculinity as a means of empowerment, *The Caxtons* was Bulwer-Lytton's response to deny his personal crisis at the time, but it also inevitably reveals the fears and anxieties that befell him as a family man.

Bulwer-Lytton's fear of weakness and disempowerment upon the threshold of aging thus comes hand-in-hand with the haunting threat of emasculation, especially given his circumstances at the time. According to Kay Heath, contemporary conceptualisations of masculinity adopted new meanings which had significant repercussions for the understanding of aging.⁸ In former times, masculinity was understood, basically, in terms of gentlemanliness, and was, thus, correspondingly

⁸ Kay Heath. *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009): 25.

associated with rank, property, manners, and appropriate social conduct. Nonetheless, subsequently masculinity seemed no longer determined by class, but it became connected instead with personal qualities such as, to use John Tosh's words, "physical vigour, courage and independence,"⁹ which were traditionally associated with youth. These revised views on masculinity meant, ultimately, that the first signs of aging were taken as a challenge that threatened men's empowered status, since these aging signs appeared to subvert most of the values associated with manliness at the time.

As Kay Heath further estimates, the new approaches to masculinity at the time involved that age became a matter for concern, insofar as masculinity became associated with values such as the ethics of work, physical toughness, imperialistic aspirations, and the opposing separation of spheres according to gender. In this respect, one of the major changes in the perception of masculinity which mostly affected aging was the new meaning attached to work. As Alexis Harley claims, Thomas Carlyle was responsible for the quintessentially Victorian coinage of the concept of 'self-help,' which first appeared in *Sartor Resartus* (1831), and later on, was reworked in Samuel Smiles' homonymous volume *Self-Help* (1859).¹⁰ Hence, in the light of the principles promoted by Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Smiles, the gospel of work was highly commended through the ethics of self-help, whereas idleness was perceived as a threat to manliness. Hence, as masculinity was partly defined by the capacity to work, the sense of weakening strength and unfitness that came along with age threatened to diminish masculinity, and conversely, feminised aging men. Likewise, a new focus placed on physical vigour, mostly as a result of the ideas lying behind the contemporary discourse of 'Muscular Christianity,' contributed to determining physical strength as an important attribute underlying masculinity. According to Donald Hall, the literary, religious, and social movement of 'Muscular Christianity' became popular in the Victorian period and highlighted the need for energetic Christian evangelism together with an ideal of vigorous masculinity, defended physical strength together with an

⁹ John Tosh. *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire*. (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005): 94.

¹⁰ Alexis Harley. *Autobiologies: Charles Darwin and the Natural History of the Self*. (London: Bucknell University Press, 2015): vii.

active pursuit of Christian ideals in life, and was mostly associated with writers such as Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes.¹¹ This emphasis on muscularity and physical ability, being for the most part associated with youth, had also a significant effect in further disassociating masculinity from aging. By extension, this masculine physicality also reflected contemporary ideas about colonialism and the belief that a strong empire was the reflection, in Kay Heath's words, of a "nation's virility."¹² Thus, the imperialistic discourse came to be strongly associated with masculinity. The link established between domination and strength as marks of masculinity also established a parallelism between manly values and youth as male youngsters settled in colonised countries in search of success to finally emerge as self-made men.

Likewise, given the Victorian gender ideology, aging masculinity was deeply affected by women's gains at the time, to the extent that manliness was approached, to use Heath's words, "in opposition to a powerful sense of the feminine other."¹³ Virility was also threatened by contextual circumstances such as the negative effects of industrialised living, which were thought to cause early aging, as well as a declining birth rate that produced fears about the weakening of male sexual potency. In this respect, according to William Acton, the beginning of impotence and male sexual decline was usually perceived as beginning at about the age of fifty,¹⁴ which also seemed to mark the entrance upon the challenge of emasculation and the feminisation of aging men. Critics such as Linda Hamilton and Teresa Mangum have described this process, arguing that "to be a man in decline was to become like a woman,"¹⁵ and that aging manliness implied "a lapse into a state akin to helpless femininity."¹⁶ Again, these

¹¹ Donald Hall. Ed. *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹² Kay Heath. *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009): 30.

¹³ Kay Heath. *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009): 31.

¹⁴ William Acton. *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life*. (London: John Churchill, 1858): 48.

¹⁵ Lisa K. Hamilton. "New Women and 'Old' Men: Gendering Degeneration." (Talia Schaffer, and Kathy Alexis Psomiades. Eds. *Women and British Aestheticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999): 75.

¹⁶ Teresa Mangum. "Growing Old: Age." (Herbert F. Tucker. Ed. *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 99.

principles significantly contributed to reinforcing further the association between masculinity and youth, and conversely, to establishing a connection between aging and emasculation.

In relation to these assumptions regarding aging and masculinity, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Caxtons* extols traditional values of family life and domesticity in an attempt to go back to traditional perceptions of masculinity, while underscoring the anxiety posed by the new perceptions of masculinity associated with roughness and strength. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's interests still lay in the country gentleman, while he also assumed that England was necessarily a country with an imperial destiny.¹⁷ This dichotomy is exemplified through young Pisistratus Caxton as he comes of age to eventually become a self-made man and a successful entrepreneur in Australia, thus typifying the values attached to masculinity and youth through work, physical vigour, courage, and imperialism. Conversely, his father, Augustine Caxton, would represent, rather, a former embodiment of masculinity, which, in the light of the new assumptions about manliness, gradually undergoes a process of enfeeblement and disempowerment which comes hand-in-hand with his own process of aging. Both father and son exemplify two different conceptualisations of masculinity, which also appear to be related to aging and youth, respectively.

In contrast with Augustine Caxton, who, in clear parallelism with Bulwer-Lytton, is eminently a man of letters, Uncle Roland, Augustine's brother, is a soldier who describes himself as 'a man of action.' In conversation with Pisistratus, Roland unfolds his doctrine about masculinity, much in tune with those precepts that associated manliness with physicality and in opposition with a traditional view of femininity, stating that, "whereas man is a rude, coarse, sensual animal, and requires all manner of associations to dignify and refine him, women are so naturally susceptible of everything beautiful in sentiment, and generous in purpose."¹⁸ Likewise, Pisistratus ponders about the outstanding differences in terms of masculinity that separate both his father and his

¹⁷ N. Al-Yasin. *Imagining the Aristocracy: The Idea of the Nation in the Novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (East Anglia, University of East Anglia, PhD dissertation, 1997): 174.

¹⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 67.

uncle, as they appear to exemplify opposite ends in the spectrum of manliness, thus claiming:

All in my uncle was stern, rough, and angular; all in my father was sweet, polished, and rounded into a natural grace. [...] Their persons corresponded with their natures. My uncle's high aquiline features, bronzed hue, rapid fire of eye, and upper lip that always quivered, were a notable contrast to my father's delicate profile, quiet, abstracted gaze, and the steady sweetness that rested on his musing smile.¹⁹

Pisistratus' description illustrates two contrasting embodiments of manliness, as Uncle Roland's strong physique and instinctive nature exemplifies Kay Heath's characterisation of masculinity as placing emphasis on physical toughness and imperialistic ideals. Alternatively, Augustine Caxton is characterised, instead, through a more refined and delicate appearance, rendering him weaker and more feminine, according to the contemporary assumptions about masculinity, and by extension, also more aged, given the prevailing discourse that associated aging in men with femininity. As a young man, Pisistratus is thus exposed to these two alternative embodiments of masculinity, which, in Kay Heath's view, exemplified former and new assumptions of manliness as values such as birth and polished manners were gradually replaced by the possession of an energetic temperament and acute potency. Pisistratus, ultimately exemplifying the new type of masculinity, eventually follows in his uncle's steps to find his self-realisation in Australia as a man of the colonies.

Given the social and cultural changes that had recently taken place in the country, Poe was also exposed to different kinds of masculinities that prevailed in the first half of nineteenth-century America. Nonetheless, owing to the circumstances befalling Poe at the moment, he found it hard to meet the corresponding demands that came along with the new times. As he grew older, his dreams of acquiring economic security and social status still seemed far from his reach, and this significantly gave rise to a haunting sense of dependence that conditioned the ways he understood his masculinity as well as his process of aging. In this respect, Poe's early arrival at Maria

¹⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 71.

Clemm's household and the consequent changes in his prospects from then on contributed greatly to destabilising Poe's sense of control over his situation at the time.

Being on bad terms with his foster father, John Allan, Poe started living in the home of his paternal aunt, Maria Clemm, when he was scarcely twenty years of age. Having been used to the sumptuousness and comfort that characterised his life in the home of his foster father, Poe noticed an important change when he came to live to his aunt's household, as he felt necessarily vulnerable at the mercy of hardly-known relatives, while he also realised that his economic and social prospects were no longer particularly alluring. His Aunt Maria had been a widow for two years by then, and she was in charge of a poverty-stricken abode in Baltimore, having different members of her family under her care. In his new home, Poe thus joined a party of five people comprising his Aunt Maria, his cousins Virginia and Henry, his paternal grandmother, and his elder brother William Henry Leonard.²⁰ Being an extensive family unit, they also felt obliged to live on very little income, mostly drawn from Henry's earnings as a mason's apprentice and Poe's allowance from John Allan, which would only last for a few more years. As an industrious woman, Maria also tried to contribute to the family income, while she also took care of those family members who were seriously ill. The fact was that Poe's cousin Henry was an irregular drinker, his brother William suffered from advanced tuberculosis, and his grandmother was an invalid, having been bedridden for two years at the time. Given their delicate condition, in a short span of time this extensive family unit was ostensibly reduced owing to the deaths of these three family members, ultimately rendering Maria, Virginia, and Poe the sole dwellers of their household.

The parts that each of the members of the Poe household were ultimately assigned contributed to subverting traditional gender roles, especially as these were never clearly established and remained in constant change. Even though Poe had married Virginia when he was in his mid-twenties, both cousins had actually been living together under the same roof for nearly seven years, that is, from the time Virginia was

²⁰ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Works*. (New York: Facts on Life, 2001): 51.

actually a child. It is for this reason that Poe's perception of Virginia necessarily underwent an important change, as his cousin grew from a child into a woman and Poe began to feel more increasingly attached to her. Nonetheless, given the circumstances, it could be argued that Poe's growing attraction towards his cousin Virginia placed him in an awkward position which contributed to destabilising his own identity as well as his place within his family. In a significantly short span of time, Poe switched roles from cousin to husband with respect to Virginia and from nephew to son-in-law regarding Maria Clemm, consequently envisioning, from then on, his aunt as his mother and his small, young cousin as his wife. Likewise, their coexistence under the care of Maria Clemm as a mother figure would also metaphorically turn Poe and Virginia into brother and sister, and furthermore, Poe's constant attentions to his wife, given her ever-fragile condition, would also symbolically turn Virginia into Poe's child bride. This became especially noticeable when Poe constantly changed his endearing terms to address Virginia, alternatively calling her 'Sis' or 'Sissy,' and 'Virgo,' and thus, placing emphasis, at different times, on Virginia's condition either as his sister or as his young wife. The recurrent variation of roles as well as the use of conflated terms to describe Poe's ever-changing position within his family – as well as that of his relatives – definitely conditioned his unstable identity as a family man on his way towards early late-age.

Initially, though, Poe's marriage to Virginia was supposed to bestow stability and security upon his life, as he was to become the head of their household, and consequently, he would have both his mother-in-law and his wife virtually under his sole protection. While he looked forward to attaining the happiness he had been bitterly denied under the care of his foster father, his new role as a husband endowed Poe with an apparent sense of control and responsibility. Having a family of his own, Poe was eager to show that he was capable of providing his family with the means to live comfortably enough. As a case in point, some months after his marriage to Virginia, Poe addressed the following letter to Maria Clemm, dated 7th April 1844, during a trip to New York, in which he gives a detailed account of the superb meals they had during the course of their stay:

Last night, for supper, we had the nicest tea you ever drank, strong and hot – wheat bread and rye bread – cheese – tea-cakes (elegant), a great dish (2 dishes) of elegant ham, and 2 of cold veal piled up like a mountain and large slices – 3 dishes of the cakes and everything in the greatest profusion. No fear of starving here [...] Sis [Virginia] is delighted, and we are both in excellent spirits. She has coughed hardly any and had no night sweat.²¹

In spite of his humble condition at the time, Poe's detailed description of the copious meals they had at a boarding-house in New York gives evidence of his great concern to show his mother-in-law that he was able to take good care of her daughter and give her the ease and comfort she deserved. However, Poe's special interest in boasting about their joyful life ultimately gives evidence of the terrible fear and anxiety that lay beneath his apparent self-confidence. Accordingly, if Virginia's healthy condition contributed to cementing Poe's self-reliance, the odds were that the aggravation of her fragile state would have an important impact on Poe's assurance and capacity to adapt to his bleak situation, thus exposing him to helplessness, dependence, and the haunting spectre of emasculation. As things turned out, Virginia recovered only to fall seriously ill again, and this intermittent state condemned Poe to live in constant anguish and fear, to the extent that, as Kenneth Silverman claims, Poe used to react to Virginia's slightest cough with a visible shudder, while the mere thought of Virginia's impending death was enough to drive him mad.²² Poe's character thus became significantly variable and unpredictable, alternating a confident and agreeable mood with a significantly erratic and dissolute behaviour that was further aggravated by the effects of his increasing intemperance.

This dual temperament in Poe remained noticeable until the last years of his life. As evidence of this, Sarah Helen Whitman, one of Poe's most beloved women late in life, in a letter addressed to John Ingram, Poe's English biographer, would explicitly refer to the double nature characterising Poe's personality. Even though Helen

²¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (7th April 1844. Arthur Hobson Quinn, and Richard Hart. Eds. *Edgar Allan Poe: Letters and Documents in the Enoch Pratt Free Library*. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1941): 21.

²² Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991): 180.

Whitman, for the most part, recalled Poe's gentle nature, in her letter she also admitted that this sweet-tempered quality of Poe's was also counteracted by an impulsive turn that used to unbalance his whole character. In this respect, Helen Whitman declared that Poe would place himself under a strict sense of self-control. However, given his extremely sensitive nature, anything could easily upset him and unleash his impetuous disposition. In fact, precisely because of Poe's utmost concern to submit himself to self-imposed restraint, his impulses were ultimately released in a remarkably aggressive way. In this sense, in Helen Whitman's recollections with regard to Poe's apparent double personality, she explicitly declared that,

no person could be long near him in his healthier moods, without loving him and putting faith in the sweetness and goodness of his nature and feeling that he had a reserved power of self-control [nonetheless,] after seeing the morbid sensitiveness of his nature and finding how slight a wound could disturb his serenity, how trivial a disappointment could unbalance his whole being, no one could feel assured of his perseverance in the thorny paths of self-denial.²³

In Helen Whitman's view, Poe was ever willing to succumb to self-discipline, and yet, no matter how hard he tried, he seemed unable to remain under its influence for too long.

In relation to Poe's tale "The Black Cat," and the interaction between aging and masculinities, in his article "Desultory Notes on Cats," published in 1844, Poe draws attention to the changing attitudes towards cats that men display as they age, stating that "very little children adore very little cats, but when the children, if boys, grow bigger, and learn the humanities at school, all about Draco, Alexander and Caesar, they change towards cats, and kill them whenever prompts them to do so."²⁴ Poe's words underscore how men appear to change attitudes as they grow older, leaving behind the loving quality of their personalities as children in favour of a more instinctual and traditionally 'masculine' disposition; a transition which apparently sanctions their entry into gender

²³ Sarah Helen Whitman. "Letter from Sarah Helen Whitman to John Ingram." (1874. John Carl Miller. Ed. *Poe's Helen Remembers*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979): 88. Also quoted in Leland S. Person. "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions." (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 150.

²⁴ Edgar Allan Poe. "Desultory Notes on Cats." (*Philadelphia Public Ledger*. 19th July 1844): 2, col. 4.

as men. Poe's tale "The Black Cat" thus warns about the consequences of subduing the instinctual side of human nature, and succumbing entirely to the rational side of human nature.

Drawing on James Gargano's interpretation of Poe's "The Black Cat," which describes the story as an exploration of the process of the moral disintegration of the narrator,²⁵ Roberta Reeder approaches "The Black Cat" as a "case of repression of instinctual psychic energy."²⁶ Following Jungian precepts, rational tendencies are symbolised by the 'animus,' whereas its feminine principle representing the instinctual and the unconscious is embodied in the 'anima.'²⁷ In Poe's tale, for the most part, the narrator identifies with his 'animus,' that is, with his reason, gradually losing touch with his 'anima' – with his instincts and his subconscious – which are symbolised in the physical embodiment of his cat, Pluto, aptly named after the god of the Underworld. In spite of the narrator's efforts to subdue his 'anima,' his instinctual forces eventually come to the surface as a result of continued repression, and become manifest in increasingly violent acts that lead him to kill his cat and to murder his wife, both cat and wife being two female facets of his 'anima.' In the event, however, the narrator's efforts come to no avail as the symbolic resurrection of his cat Pluto through the unexpected appearance of another cat, and the second cat's audibly loud mewing from the depths of the tomb, in which it has been walled-up together with the narrator's wife, provides macabre proof of the impossibility of subduing the 'anima.' According to Roberta Reeder, Poe's tale warns about the need to gain insight into the instinctual part of one's personality, as acting against it only leads to destruction, while, like Jung, Poe also defended the belief that it is precisely the instinctual side of human nature that becomes the source of intuition and of creativity.²⁸

Critic Roberta Reeder's more contemporary interpretation of Poe's "The Black Cat" bears some resemblance with the seminal psychoanalytical interpretation that

²⁵ James Gargano. "'The Black Cat' Perverseness Reconsidered." (William Howarth. Ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Poe's Tales*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971): 87-94.

²⁶ Roberta Reeder. "'The Black Cat' as a Study in Repression." (*Poe Studies* 7.1. June 1974): 20.

²⁷ Carl Jung. *Alchemical Studies*, vol. XIII. [Trans. R.F.C. Hull] (*Bollingen Series XX*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1967): 42.

²⁸ Roberta Reeder. "'The Black Cat' as a Study in Repression." (*Poe Studies* 7.1. June 1974): 21.

Marie Bonaparte provided of the same tale. In the course of her analysis, Bonaparte draws attention to the narrator's confessional tone, which is the result of two opposite forces, such as 'the conscience' which demands punishment for a sinful conduct, and 'the exhibitionist instinct' that urges the subject to indulge in criminal acts. The textualised juxtaposition of these two forces naturally draws on the Freudian dichotomy, insofar as the narrator's confession, which gives shape to the tale, responds both to his imperative *superego* and to his instinctual *id*.²⁹ Similarly, as Bonaparte further argues, drawing on biographical details, Poe's domesticity was characterised by docility and compliance, in clear contrast with the fictitious narrator's violent impulses of his tale.

Poe's dual nature and susceptible condition come to the surface in his tale "The Black Cat," which was written precisely in the context of his married life, when Virginia remained in a delicate state of health, and Poe was assigned whole responsibility for the care of his family. At the time, Poe felt under great pressure, given his anguishing life in domesticity, while he was required to retain his self-possession in spite of the dramatic circumstances that surrounded him. Those anxieties haunting Poe were mostly rooted in fear of helplessness, impotence, and inability to cope with the demands that were being placed on him as a family man. Poe's situation at the time brings to mind that of the narrator in "The Black Cat," since its protagonist undergoes a significant change in his nature, transforming his former loving temper into a disproportionately aggressive disposition owing to the pervasive and symbolic presence of a black cat in his household.

At the beginning of Poe's tale "The Black Cat," the narrator gives signs of his compliant and submissive nature, recollecting how fond of pets he was as a child, and declaring that he has shared this affection with his wife from the onset of their marriage. Significantly, the narrator also remarks that his meek nature and his love for pets even grew in the course of his manhood, thus confessing that,

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my

²⁹ Marie Bonaparte. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. [Trans. John Rodker] (London: Imago, 1949): 463.

companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure.³⁰

Nonetheless, in spite of his everlasting fondness for pets, the presence of a black cat, significantly named Pluto, contributes to altering the narrator's kind-hearted disposition from then on, to the extent that he even begins to abuse his formerly-beloved wife. Even though Pluto is a docile and loving pet, its continuous presence begins to exert a malignant influence on the narrator, urging him to perpetrate violent acts against the cat itself, and even ultimately, against his own wife. Most importantly, it is in the prime of his manhood that the narrator leaves behind his docile nature to acquire a violent temper that becomes more and more aggressive owing to his increasing intemperance. In this respect, his two opposite qualities – his former docility and his growing aggressiveness – remain in constant contention as the narrator struggles between release and repression.

From the beginning, Pluto, the black cat, is compared with a witch, as the narrator's wife contends that all black cats are witches in disguise. This simile has led critics such as Daniel Hoffman to claim that the black cat in Poe's tale ultimately represents a displacement of the narrator's wife.³¹ In this sense, it is argued that the narrator is truly haunted by his oppressive life in domesticity in the company of his wife, and by the haunting ghost of emasculation that threatens to undermine his manhood. The narrator's aggressive behaviour thus responds to the haunting feeling of perceiving his manliness under constant threat. The black cat in the tale becomes a reification of the narrator's anxieties, as it brings back memories of the meek and docile qualities that used to characterise his temperament and which he has canalised, for the most part, through his lifetime affection for his pet animals. In this sense, the narrator attacks Pluto in an attempt to exorcise the threat of emasculation that he feels to be permanently haunting him. Through his aggressive behaviour, the narrator ultimately

³⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Black Cat." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches, 1843-1849*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 850.

³¹ Daniel Hoffman. *Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe*. (New York: Doubleday, 1998): 233.

seeks to escape the oppressiveness of the domestic space so as to regain his manliness as, living a life in permanent domesticity, he perceives his manly qualities to be dangerously at stake.

The haunting ghost of emasculation and the resulting anxieties that came along with it played an important role in Poe's life at the time, since, in his constant care of his wife Virginia, he became increasingly attached to a domestic scenario. As a result of this pervasive anxiety, in Poe's tale "The Black Cat," an intrinsic correlation is ultimately established between the act of writing and the narrator's release of his aggressiveness. In the tale, not only does the narrator confess his crime through writing, but he also admits having employed a penknife as the weapon to assault the black cat, thus, admitting, in both cases, to having used a pen to accomplish his deeds. Accordingly, as Christopher Benfey contends, in this context, writing ultimately becomes an act of violence.³² It is through writing as well as through his resort to violence that the narrator seeks to exorcise his fear of emasculation and disempowerment. The narrative becomes a confession of the narrator's guilt – an act of weakness that betrays his fear of emasculation – inasmuch as it is also a boasting disclosure of his crime, as the narrator recounts his violent reactions lavishly so as to try to regain his threatened masculinity in a process that can be interpreted as one of masculinisation.

For Poe, his tale "The Black Cat" reflected the anguishing atmosphere characterising the domestic domain in which he felt trapped, as he witnessed the gradual deterioration of his wife and his consequent impotence to do anything that would help improve her condition. In this respect, his tale can be envisioned as Poe's unsuccessful attempt at escaping from an oppressive domestic space in order to regain some sense of control through writing. In the tale, the narrator struggles to get rid of the black cat only to be recurrently haunted by its presence, just like, in his life, Poe desperately tried to cling to hope only to find himself falling deeper into despair. At the time, Poe was permanently oscillating between assurance and desolation, as his wife recovered from

³² Christopher Benfey. "Poe and the Unreadable: 'The Black Cat' and 'The Tell-Tale Heart'." (Kenneth Silverman. Ed. *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 36.

her fatal disease only to fall ill again. Poe thus felt under constant distress, as, for years, he had to go through a traumatic situation that gradually took away all his strength and propelled him further into early late-age in spite of his considerable youth. In retrospect, towards the end of his life, Poe recollected this dramatic episode of his life in a letter that he addressed to his friend George Eveleth, pointing out the “never-ending oscillation between hope and despair”³³ in the last years of Virginia’s illness, which nearly placed him on the verge of insanity and caused him to drink profusely in an attempt to escape the bleak reality around.

This everlasting anguish which permanently undermined Poe’s peace of mind was rooted not only in his personal domestic situation, but it was also conditioned by cultural demands entangled in the new conceptions of masculinity that prevailed at the time. The double nature characterising the narrator in Poe’s tale “The Black Cat” gives evidence of the tension between his self-control and his need to give free vent to his basest instincts. In this respect, according to Leland Person, the depiction of male models in Poe’s tales mostly reveals an extraordinary tension between a gentlemanly surface and a violent depth,³⁴ which significantly underscored the controversy that was taking place among latent nineteenth-century constructions of masculinity. In his profuse study about manhood in America, Michael Kimmel contended that manhood in the nineteenth-century was, for the most part, made up of three male models, they being the genteel patriarch grounded in landownership, the independent artisan, and the self-made man.³⁵ These three competing models coexisted while the new middle class ideology gave increasing prominence to self-made manhood. Accordingly, the genteel patriarch and the independent artisan gradually gave way to a model of manhood that defended competitive individualism. In this new order of things, the question of men’s self-control came to the fore and became a basic trait that characterised the male personality. In this respect, the Christian gentleman was alleged to avoid excess in all

³³ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter to George Eveleth.” (New York, 4th January 1848. See *Poe’s Letters* on the *Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4801040.htm>

³⁴ Leland S. Person. “Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions.” (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 150.

³⁵ Michael S. Kimmel. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. (New York: Free Press, 1996): 9.

things and submit himself to some restraint. If, in economic terms, success in the marketplace required control, in individual terms, the male body had to be self-disciplined and controlled by the will. Nonetheless, as Leland Person claims, in contrast to the gentle Christian gentleman – legacy of the gentry – the masculine achiever at the time – the self-made man – was conversely endowed with qualities that seemed to subvert self-control such as physical vigour and even aggressiveness.³⁶ Consequently, in the discourse of masculinity at the time, given the rise of the middle class, there was a tension established between the ethics of self-control, and conversely, the physical drive that seemed to be inherent in self-made manhood.

In the spectrum of these constructions of masculinity, Poe mostly praised the male model represented by the Southern gentleman. In fact, according to David Leverenz, the ideal of the Southern gentleman played a significant role not only in Poe's writings, but also in the course of all his life.³⁷ The ideal Southern gentleman was given a classical education and a Christian upbringing, he showed an upright moral control, and his conduct was regulated by a strict code of honour whereby his manhood was put to the test. In this respect, Southerners were particularly sensitive about their virility and eager to defend it whenever they found it under threat. Hence, as David Leverenz further argues, underlying their code of honour, there was a contradictory dichotomy established between an apparent dignified gentility and a latent combative competitiveness which, if necessary, was resorted to in order to prove their manhood.³⁸ For years, Poe had aspired to join this ideal of manliness. Nonetheless, before long, he had to leave behind his hopes of becoming a Southern gentleman when his foster father, John Allan, rejected him as his heir owing to his recurrent erratic behaviour. In fact, Poe admitted his change of circumstances in a letter he addressed to John Pendleton Kennedy, in which Poe declared himself to be in a state of sheer helplessness:

³⁶ Leland S. Person. "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions." (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 150.

³⁷ David Leverenz. "Poe and Gentry Virginia." (Shawn Rosenheim, and Stephen Rachman. Eds. *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 211.

³⁸ David Leverenz. "Poe and Gentry Virginia." (Shawn Rosenheim, and Stephen Rachman. Eds. *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 215.

Since the day you first saw me my situation in life has altered materially. At that time I looked forward to the inheritance of a large fortune, and, in the meantime, was in receipt of an annuity sufficient for my support. This was allowed me by a gentleman of Virginia (Mr John Allan) [...] who, until lately, always treated me with the affection of a father. But a second marriage on his part, and I dare say many follies on my own at length ended in a quarrel between us. He is now dead, and has left me nothing. I am thrown entirely upon my own resources with no profession and very few friends.³⁹

Poe's farewell to his aspirations of becoming a Southern gentleman came necessarily to be transmuted into his fiction, and conditioned his life from then onwards. In his tales – "The Black Cat" being a case in point – Poe depicts narrators that adopt poses corresponding to those of the Southern gentleman. In this sense, Poe constructs this type of manliness as he portrays cultivated narrators that display exaggerated traits of the Southern gentleman, thus showing his nostalgia for an idealised condition that he had bitterly been denied. Nonetheless, as representative Southern gentlemen, Poe's narrators also display an apparent cool reasoning that is ultimately subverted by constant outbursts of impulsiveness. In this respect, Poe's narrators are unable to master themselves, ultimately exposing their gentility to be literally a fiction, as Poe admitted the defeat of his aristocratic aspirations.

Having been rejected as John Allan's heir when he was already well into his manhood, Poe sought to acquire a social status of his own through his profession as a writer. As Pierre Bourdieu claims, in a post-aristocratic society, cultural capital is what ultimately secures and conveys the highest social status,⁴⁰ and Poe made use of his intellectual talent as a writer to achieve a high social position and construct his own manliness. From then on, it was through writing that Poe adopted his own views about gentlemanliness, since, as David Leverenz argues, for Poe, textualisation itself was the

³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter to John Pendleton Kennedy." (19th November 1834. See *Poe's Letters* on the *Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p3412190.htm>

⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. [Trans. Richard Nice] (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

source of true aristocracy.⁴¹ Poe gave shape to idealisations of gentry traditions and portraits of aggressiveness, which both constructed and deconstructed the ethics of the Southern gentleman, that is, the ideal to which Poe had aspired and also had to subvert on his way to early late-age so as to construct his own masculinity and build a future of his own.

Bulwer-Lytton's parenthood and pedagogical fiction: Emily and Robert

As a result of his personal crisis, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned *The Caxtons* in response to a haunting threat of emasculation, especially after his tragic separation from his wife and the menace to which he was permanently exposed publicly, given Rosina Wheeler's tendency to spread scandal and divulge private matters with a view to abash and humiliate her husband. Nevertheless, it was also a crucial moment for Bulwer-Lytton as a parent, having to bear the tragic death of his daughter Emily Lytton when she was scarcely nineteen years of age, while facing his wife's accusations of having neglected their child to the extent of ultimately causing her death. This tragic experience also led Bulwer-Lytton to ponder about parenthood in his novel *The Caxtons*, which resulted in latent memories of his late daughter and a renewed concern for his second child and heir, Robert, who, by the time *The Caxtons* was published, had turned eighteen years of age and was well on his way to adulthood.

Bulwer-Lytton's reflections about parenthood were also inevitably conditioned by the early absence of his father, as well as the long-lasting influence his mother, Elizabeth Barbara, had exerted upon him all through his life until she passed away, six years before his novel *The Caxtons* came to light. This influence and perpetual remembrance extended years after the death of his mother, especially as Rosina Wheeler, by means of her perpetual calumnies, constantly reminded Bulwer-Lytton of his great mistake, that is, having married her, and more particularly, having done so against his mother's will. The death of his beloved mother, which occurred when Bulwer-Lytton had turned forty, certainly unleashed Bulwer-Lytton's reflections upon

⁴¹ David Leverenz. "Poe and Gentry Virginia." (Shawn Rosenheim, and Stephen Rachman. Eds. *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 220.

his own process of aging, since he felt the last ties to his youth were ultimately being severed. As evidence of this, in a letter he wrote to his lifetime close friend Lady Blessington in 1843, shortly after his mother's demise, Bulwer-Lytton described, in the following terms, the great sorrow he felt for the loss of his mother, as well as the effect her demise had on the way he felt about aging:

In her I have lost a thousand ties in one. It was almost the great affection of my life. [...] She was so young of heart and mind, so full of energy and will. The soul seemed to live on when the body was a shadow. [...] Nothing that reminds me I have ever been young is left. [...] I believe and I hope that that grief will last; it is the last earthly link between us. I would not break it for all the joys or triumphs I dreamed of at sixteen.⁴²

Bulwer-Lytton's words at this stage reveal his definitive entrance into maturity and aging, as, he admits that, having lost his mother, any ties that bound him to his youth had also been utterly cut. Through these painful memories, Bulwer-Lytton acknowledges the deep bond that joined him to his mother, as well as his high regard for her, praising her young spirit and undefeatable energy at the age of seventy, shortly before she died. Nonetheless, the loss of his mother further impelled Bulwer-Lytton to start facing his process of aging at the age of forty, given that, to use his words, he felt that there was nothing left to remind him explicitly that he had ever been young. Deprived of his role as a son, he increasingly gained more awareness of his role as a parent, trying to inculcate his children with the way to proceed in life, and in this way, imitating his own mother, inasmuch as she had always been particularly careful to supervise the behaviour and education of her youngest son. Bulwer-Lytton displayed his role as a parent through authority and respect, continuously making demands on his children, but for the most part, remaining a distant father, which contributed further to increasing the sense of awe and reverence that both Emily Lytton and Robert would always show towards their father.

⁴² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Lady Blessington." (1843. Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II.* London: Macmillan, 1913): 19.

According to Leslie Mitchell, both Bulwer-Lytton and his wife Rosina had always remained distant from their children, both physically and emotionally, choosing to hand them to schoolmasters and friends of the family, instead of living with them in the early years of their children's lives.⁴³ Nonetheless, even if from a distance, Bulwer-Lytton used to write long letters addressed to his children so as to closely supervise their upbringing and education. Being a demanding father also endowed Bulwer-Lytton with a sense of control, envisioning himself as a highly-esteemed father figure, while trying to regain his authority and self-respect, which he felt always to be under threat through his wife Rosina's continuous defamation. In this sense, as Leslie Mitchell asserts, Bulwer-Lytton issued instructions on the proper way his children should be brought up,⁴⁴ trying to avoid what he considered his wife's pernicious influence on his children, and out of jealousy, fiercely competing with her to win their children's affection. However, Bulwer-Lytton began to grow more aware of his condition as a parent when he noticed that his children had grown up after long intervals of time being apart. As evidence of Bulwer-Lytton's increasing affection for his children, in a letter to his mother, dated 12th January 1838, he referred to his children with exultant pride, stating they "are so grown, so improved, so intelligent, they can understand me now!"⁴⁵ Through his words he admitted that, as his children grew older, he felt more attached to them, noticing that it was not until then that he could discuss important matters and advise them on how to proceed to make him a proud father. Nevertheless, his concern to influence his children and make demands on them inevitably underscored his need to exert his role as a parent in order to regain some sense of control over his domestic life.

Bulwer-Lytton's relationship with his daughter Emily Lytton, and particularly, her subsequent death at the early age of nineteen, not only involved a great blow as a father, but it also contributed greatly to increasing his sense of guilt, which deeply

⁴³ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London: 2003): 67.

⁴⁴ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London: 2003): 68.

⁴⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to His Wife, Rosina." 12th January 1838. Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London: 2003): 69.

affected the way he envisioned his process of aging from then onwards. In this respect, memories of his daughter remain latent through Bulwer-Lytton's *The Caxtons*, given that, being a domestic and an eminently pedagogical novel, it discusses different models of womanhood, and among them, the one which Bulwer-Lytton certainly showed a preference for and tried to inculcate into his daughter Emily throughout her short life. In his view, in order to reinforce a particular type of masculinity – exemplified through Pisistratus Caxton, as a model to be followed by his son Robert – Bulwer-Lytton felt that it was necessary to encourage a particular kind of femininity as a counterpart. Likewise, given his own experience in his failed marriage, Bulwer-Lytton deemed important to differentiate female socialites – as exemplified by Lady Caroline Lamb, and as he was to find out later on, by his wife Rosina Wheeler – from whom he truly perceived to be morally upright ladies – like his mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, and his daughter, Emily Lytton.

In *The Caxtons*, the first woman Pisistratus ever falls in love with is Fanny Trevanion, with whom he becomes acquainted while he is working as a secretary for her father. As Augustine Caxton reveals, Fanny is the daughter of Ellinor Trevanion, with whom Augustine also fell deeply in love before he finally decided to marry his wife Kitty. Both Ellinor and Fanny illustrate a certain type of womanhood that Bulwer-Lytton felt attracted to, but gradually learnt to dismiss. As a young, wealthy heiress of outstanding beauty, Fanny Trevanion's character is endowed with a mixture of innocence and insolence that often puzzles Pisistratus. Fanny's coquettish and playful manners as a socialite reveal an acute capacity to deceive and the artful ability to have her own way. It is in the following way that Pisistratus Caxton describes Fanny Trevanion and her whimsical nature:

Fanny, indeed, perplexed me horribly. Sometimes I fancied she liked me; but the fancy scarce thrilled me with delight before it vanished in the frost of a careless look, or the cold beam of a sarcastic laugh. Spoiled darling of the world as she was, she seemed so innocent in her exuberant happiness, that one forgot all her faults in that atmosphere of joy which she diffused around her.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 158.

In spite of Pisistratus' attraction towards the young coquette, Fanny Trevanion finally marries the highly-successful Lord Castleton, just as, in former times, her mother, Ellinor, had also married Albert Trevanion instead of her other suitor Augustine Caxton, Pisistratus' father.

In the depiction of these female socialites, Fanny and Ellinor, Bulwer-Lytton might well have had in mind memories of his relationship with Lady Caroline Lamb in his youth and the misery he experienced as a result of her playful ways. Fanny's ambivalent nature and Pisistratus' need to gain insight into her real character also bear resemblance to Bulwer-Lytton's eventual realisation of his wife Rosina's true nature when it seemed to be much too late. In *The Caxtons*, however, neither Augustine nor his son Pisistratus marry coquettish women such as Ellinor and Fanny Trevanion. Instead, both father and son marry women who exemplify a very different kind of womanhood, which, in turn, complements the type of manhood Bulwer-Lytton aimed to illustrate through this domestic novel. Kitty and Blanche, the respective wives of Augustine and Pisistratus, are depicted as perfect companions for their husbands, and their natures clearly differ from that of the socialite types, Ellinor and Fanny. Kitty becomes the epitome of the homely wife, and as her name indicates rather sarcastically, she stands as the reification of a 'little kitten' living contentedly in quiet domesticity. As stated in the novel, Kitty also presents many "womanly accomplishments,"⁴⁷ given that she can draw, paint, play music, and sing skilfully. Also, as the wife of a scholar, Kitty's discreet and practical-minded character matches and complements that of her husband, who, for the most part, spends his time in deep commitment to the world of thought and study. In this sense, as Pisistratus admits, his mother Kitty thinks of her husband as "the best and the greatest of human beings,"⁴⁸ she knows him thoroughly and never contradicts him, although, even if surreptitiously, she also learns the way to persuade him and win him

⁴⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 22.

⁴⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 12.

over. In this respect, she is meek and docile, impersonating a perfect mother figure, devoted primarily to the care of her husband and son.

In clear resemblance to Kitty, Blanche, Pisistratus' prospective wife, also shares the same qualities pertaining to a domestic type of femininity. Being the daughter of Uncle Roland, Blanche is also Pisistratus' young cousin, and by nature, the opposite in terms of character of her dissipated brother, Francis Vivian. Even if Pisistratus first feels attracted to Fanny Trevanion's fine looks, Blanche patiently learns to wait for his affection, behaving like a loving and dutiful little cousin. As her name also indicates, Blanche becomes the epitome of purity and truthfulness, standing in sharp contrast with the deceitful ways that characterise her womaniser brother and the playful nature of her rival, Fanny. Through the many letters his mother Kitty sends him while he is in Australia, Pisistratus gradually gains awareness into Blanche's character as she comes of age and, while Blanche awaits his return – like a Penelope waiting for her Ulysses –, Pisistratus learns of “her forethought and tender activity, of her warm heart and sweet temper,” as well as of her “charitable visits to the village, instructing the young and tending on the old.”⁴⁹ Blanche thus illustrates the values of tenderness, sweetness, dutifulness, and devotion to others, which also characterise the traditional female figure of ‘the angel in the house.’ This type of femininity demands a corresponding type of masculinity to complement and reinforce each other. In this sense, on his steady path to adulthood, and thus, on his way to acquiring manliness far away from home, Pisistratus gradually learns to praise Blanche's good qualities to the extent that he marries her shortly after his return to England.

The feminine qualities that Blanche exemplifies in *The Caxtons* are illustrative of a model of womanhood that Bulwer-Lytton clearly favoured in opposition to the challenging and liberated ways that used to characterise his wife Rosina. Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton's concern to extol this particular kind of womanhood also uncovers some of his anxieties at the time, particularly his deep sorrow at the premature death of his daughter Emily Lytton, in addition to Rosina's ever-haunting presence that reminds

⁴⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 467.

him and accuses him of the deed. Bulwer-Lytton's preference for the type of womanhood that Blanche exemplifies also aims to challenge Rosina's type of womanhood which came hand-in-hand with the haunting threat of emasculation that he was facing at the time. Likewise, the dutiful and submissive ways that Blanche displays are strongly remindful of those of Bulwer-Lytton's late daughter Emily Lytton. Given the fact that Emily had perished scarcely one year prior to the publication of *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton's pedagogical novel about life in domesticity can also be regarded as his personal homage to his daughter. The spirit of duty and sacrifice of Blanche in the novel fits perfectly with that of Bulwer-Lytton's daughter, who devoted most of her life to gain her father's attention, exchanging letters with him, while struggling to meet his constant demands.

Emily spent most of her life detached from her family, living abroad in Germany, while her father strictly supervised her upbringing and used his declining health as an excuse for his prolonged absence. In this sense, Bulwer-Lytton's daughter, Emily, was brought up principally by a friend of the family, Miss Greene, who apparently got to know Emily in greater depth than her own parents. It was Miss Greene who initially opposed parental proposals to send Emily to school when she turned eleven. But when, in the autumn of 1842, it was finally decided that Emily should be sent to Germany, Miss Greene not only accompanied her protégée, but she also established herself in Frankfurt to supervise Emily's life and education. Emily's childhood was likely to be particularly miserable, since, to use Leslie Mitchell's words, both Emily and her brother Robert seemed to grow up with "the notion that they were required to expiate some terrible guilt,"⁵⁰ being constantly required to submit to their father's wishes and demands so as to gain their corresponding share of his 'alleged' affection. Nonetheless, even from a distance, Bulwer-Lytton took great care to supervise his daughter's upbringing, ensuring it would fit a particular conception of womanhood, which was, for the most part, as unlike that of his wife Rosina as possible. In this sense, with regard to her education, Emily Lytton was merely prescribed notions of French,

⁵⁰ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 72.

history, music, and drawing. Likewise, her upbringing also involved corrective measures to fit a particular ideal of beauty required in young girls, which, in her case, was particularly aimed at drawing attention away from her misshapen shoulder and at taking good care of her appearance with a view to attracting respect and admiration. Her character was also carefully supervised in order to ensure she was tidy and meticulous, and thereby, to fulfil the role that she was expected to adopt in the home. In this way, she was made to follow Bulwer-Lytton's dictates that "want of forethought and a certain preciseness is a great blot in a woman's character [...], and [that] there is nothing more valuable whether to her father or her husband, than the habit of order and housewifeliness."⁵¹ Each one of these demands clearly fits the model of womanhood he would later extol in his domestic novel through the characterisations of Kitty and Blanche, in particular.

Despite Bulwer-Lytton's concern to make constant demands on his daughter Emily, it is a stated fact that they hardly seemed to see each other as Bulwer-Lytton often excused his absence claiming he had literary deadlines to meet or economic constraints to face. The state of his own health, which gradually became a cause for concern, would also justify his absence, owing to Bulwer-Lytton's increasing hypochondria. In this respect, when Emily turned fifteen years of age and returned from Germany to live in her father's house, Knebworth, Bulwer-Lytton often remained elsewhere, whether in London to attend to his political duties, or in Malvern to alleviate his declining health. Consequently, even though they constantly seemed to seek the affection of one another, when father and daughter finally met, a sort of restraint would ultimately come to the surface, as Emily was, for the most part, unable to overcome her great awe towards her own father, while Bulwer-Lytton seemed to lack the ability to show his affection towards his daughter.

Emily's personality was docile and submissive, and she was always eager to comply with her father's wishes, even contributing to lessening her father's expenses by taking on the translation of some German texts, if that might lead to an improvement in

⁵¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Miss Greene." [Undated] Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 68.

her father's condition as well as to softening his stern judgment of her. In the course of her short life, Emily often had to deal with the depressive and hypochondriac personality of her father, as Bulwer-Lytton showed in a letter addressed to his daughter just one year prior to her death:

Often in this struggle for Health, which is something like a daily war with a living foe, when I contemplate the failure that is beyond – Youth gone with all that could cheer it – a hereafter of suffering and sickness, probably to increase, as life must now tend to all decline [...] no companionship, except my children [...] and you are with me but for a while – our years themselves divide us. Before you lies the future of new ties, before me but the grave of the old. [...] When all these shadows rise before me often I am tempted to give up the strife and lie down and die. But then happily comes a better courage.⁵²

In his daughter Emily, Bulwer-Lytton always found a patient correspondent, who was always eager to accept his commands in exchange for his affection. Nevertheless, the constant demands on his daughter and his extended complaints about his poor health soon turned into a burden hard to bear when, only one year later, Emily passed away after a severe attack of typhoid fever. As a compliant daughter, Emily had frequently heeded and reacted to her father's reflections about his declining health and progressive aging, which, in many cases, were the result of a commonly depressive and hypochondriac mood. However, when the tables were turned, and Emily turned from carer to patient, not only was Bulwer-Lytton deprived of a loving daughter and a patient companion, but he was also compelled to bear a great deal of guilt, even if, openly, he would always blame his wife Rosina for the death of their daughter. In a letter to his lifetime friend John Forster, Bulwer-Lytton expressed his terrible grief claiming that "she is dead, dead, Emily my child – pity me, I am crushed down."⁵³ Out of the unbearable pain at the loss of his young daughter, Bulwer-Lytton's reaction was to turn his whole attention to his son Robert, warning him about the harmful influence of his

⁵² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to his daughter Emily." 1847. Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 74.

⁵³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to John Forster." 1848. Quoted in Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury: Shire Publications, 1973): 35.

mother Rosina and advising him to follow his guidance so as to make him a proud father.

The relationship that Bulwer-Lytton always had with his son Robert was mainly characterised by awe and respect from son to father, in resemblance with the affective bond that Bulwer-Lytton also had with his daughter. Looking upon him as his sole heir, Bulwer-Lytton often adopted the pose of a stern father, who constantly made demands on his son. As an ambitious man himself, Bulwer-Lytton wished his son Robert excelled in everything he undertook so that his father could take pride in him. Like his sister Emily, whom he adored, Robert also struggled to fulfil his father's great expectations, even if, as a son, he often failed to achieve such challenging demands. In fact, Robert's erratic behaviour often met with harsh reproaches which resulted in renewed efforts to reconcile himself with his father. In this sense, in *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to display pedagogically what, in his view, was the rightful way to come-of-age for his own son. Hence, through the characterisation of Pisistratus Caxton, Bulwer-Lytton mapped out the specific type of masculinity that he wished his son Robert would adhere to, and which matched the kind of femininity he had also demanded from his daughter Emily. Robert spent most of his lonely childhood detached from his father, in the care of John Forster, whom Robert would ultimately regard as a second father. Like his sister, Robert was sent early on to the boarding school of Harrow, and was allowed to see his father only once a year. For all his life, Robert held his father in high esteem, and constantly looked forward to gaining his confidence and affection. At the young age of thirteen, Robert struggled to get closer to his father, noticing the latter was reticent to establish a firm relationship with him in spite of the intimate bond that joined them. With this in mind, in a letter, dated January 1844, Robert addressed his father stating: "I am your son. Let me be your friend [...] if you will accept my sympathy I am ready to give it to you – if you still care for it."⁵⁴ As shown in this letter, Robert often longed for his father's approval and remained in constant fear of disappointing him, which was

⁵⁴ Robert Lytton. "Letter of Robert Lytton to His Father, Edward Bulwer-Lytton." January 1844. Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 77.

symptomatic of the sort of emotional domination that Bulwer-Lytton would always exert over him.

Bulwer-Lytton's close supervision of his son responded to his personal need to gain control over the course of his own life at the time. Facing the threat of emasculation – deprived of his role as a husband and bearing a period of declining health as a result of the strain endured – he was in desperate need to regain power and authority. Bulwer-Lytton aimed to do so by taking responsibility for his son's reformation, just as, in former times, his own mother, Elizabeth Barbara, had also exerted a tight control over him. Through his parental role as educator, Bulwer-Lytton established directions that closely regulated his son's upbringing, detaching him from his mother Rosina and encouraging him to acquire the sort of manliness he could only approve of. Through many letters, Bulwer-Lytton carefully supervised Robert's behaviour, even in terms of the friendships he had to seek and those he simply had to discourage, according to his father's prescriptions. Nonetheless, no matter how hard he tried, it seemed that Robert was fated to constantly let his father down. As a case in point, Bulwer-Lytton played an important role in placating his son Robert's rebellious nature in adolescence. As Leslie Mitchell recounts, when Robert turned nineteen years of age, Bulwer-Lytton received further notice of his son's continuous misdeeds.⁵⁵ In the course of his visits to Belgium and Germany, after finishing school at Harrow, it seemed that Robert finally chose to give free vent to his instincts. Apparently, among the irregularities of his behaviour, he experimented with alcohol, tobacco, and laudanum, while he also committed excesses having affairs with different girls of dubious reputation. Robert's misconduct at the time further unleashed Bulwer-Lytton's anger and concern to try to amend his son's profligate ways. In this respect, in a letter dated 25th February 1850 and addressed to his friend John Forster, Bulwer-Lytton showed his contempt for his son's misconduct, stating that, in his view, his son's naughtiness was not the result of "the excess of youth, but [rather, of] the morbid miserable vileness of a

⁵⁵ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 78.

debauched old age.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, despite his son’s obvious youth, Bulwer-Lytton was reluctant to perceive Robert’s misdeeds as a distinct feature of the rebellious nature that often characterises youth. Instead, he saw in it the vicious quality marking the loss of innocence that comes hand-in-hand with age. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton was also eager to attribute Robert’s dissolute ways to the Irish origins and liberal upbringing of his mother, Rosina, believing that her blood was ultimately coming out in their son. At the time, Bulwer-Lytton insisted that his health was in serious decline, owing to Robert’s irresponsible behaviour and the constant humiliations that he had to endure on his account. Consequently, following his friend John Forster’s advice, Bulwer-Lytton decided to send his son Robert to Washington to join his uncle Henry on a diplomatic mission, in the hope that, being far away from his country, family and friends, his son would reconsider his acts and learn from his mistakes. Through this resolution, Bulwer-Lytton hoped to redeem the personal outrage that he had to face because of his son, as well as inculcate Robert some discipline that would reform his dissipated ways.

Robert’s reprobate conduct seems to find its literary counterpart through the characterisation of Francis Vivian in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *The Caxtons*, both in terms of the influence of his parental origins, as well as in terms of his misbehaviour and ulterior reformation. In the novel, Francis Vivian is the son of Uncle Roland and his wife Ramouna, whom Roland meets in his youth while fighting in a battle in Spain. Even if totally unaware of her actual origins, Roland falls in love and marries Ramouna soon after they first meet, while he is being attended to for a wound in her house. As regards Ramouna’s origins, Roland eventually learns that she is the daughter of a wealthy gypsy man and a Spanish woman. When Ramouna was very young, her father died, and her mother became the only person responsible for her upbringing. However, after her mother passed away and Ramouna had given birth to her son Francis, her father’s kindred came round to help her rear the child. Given his wife’s family background, in Roland’s view, it is Ramouna’s blood which mainly came out in their

⁵⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to John Forster.” 25th February 1850. Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 78.

son, as Roland believes that Francis' passionate and rebellious character can only resemble that of his mother.

Ramouna's ludicrous story in *The Caxtons* inevitably brings to mind that of Bulwer-Lytton's wife, Rosina, not only because of the striking similarities between their names – Ramouna and Rosina – but also in terms of the parallels their lives present, as well as the pernicious influence that Bulwer-Lytton believed Rosina had also exerted upon their son Robert. As is the case of Ramouna in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Rosina's parental background always seemed to exert an important influence on her personality. Rosina was of Irish origin and Catholic extraction, and her upbringing was considered liberal and free-spirited at the time. She was the daughter of Anna Doyle, a radical free thinker, and Francis Massy Wheeler, a hunting squire, who was also believed to be rather fond of drinking. Like Ramouna, Rosina was mostly brought up by her mother, as Anna Wheeler left her husband when Rosina was only ten years of age, taking her two daughters, Henrietta and Rosina, to live in Guernsey with her uncle, who was governor of the island. Ramouna's vivacious personality, given her background, is also significantly remindful of that of Rosina. According to David Lytton Cobbold, Bulwer-Lytton's wife had,

most of the virtues and many of the amiable weaknesses peculiar to her nationality [as] she was [...] warm-hearted, sensitive, and generous to a fault, of an intensely passionate and highly strung organisation, proud, no doubt, possibly too apt to feel keenly neglect or coldness, but ever ready to forgive even the most unpardonable offences.⁵⁷

Likewise, as Bulwer-Lytton identified Rosina's maternal influence on their son once Robert started to show an erratic behaviour, in the novel *The Caxtons*, Uncle Roland is also eager to detect Ramouna's ardent nature every time his son Francis shows signs of his defiant personality.

The association established between the fictional character of Ramouna in *The Caxtons* and Bulwer-Lytton's wife Rosina – in terms of their background and

⁵⁷ David Lytton Cobbold. *A Blighted Marriage: The Life of Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Irish Beauty, Satirist and Tormented Victorian Wife*. (Knebworth: Knebworth House Education and Preservation Trust, 1999): 2.

personalities – can also be correspondingly extended to Francis Vivian and Bulwer-Lytton's son Robert, especially given the irresponsible behaviour they both exhibit in youth, according to their respective fathers. In his pedagogical aim to warn his son about the right way to come-of-age, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned Pisistratus Caxton as the example of the particular type of masculinity he extolled, whereas, conversely, through the character of Francis Vivian – who acts as a counterpart to Pisistratus – Bulwer-Lytton aimed to illustrate the type of masculinity he wished his son Robert would definitively discard and leave behind. As a case in point, in Bulwer-Lytton's *The Caxtons*, on his way to rise up in society, Francis Vivian commits himself to seducing Fanny Trevanion in order to gain entry into the upper social circles and attain wealth and prosperity without effort. In order to achieve his aim, Francis Vivian plans to put Fanny's virtue in jeopardy, so that she will feel ultimately obliged to join him in marriage. Following Francis' instructions, Fanny is made to believe her father is ill, and betrayed by her servants, she is handed to Francis and is left entirely to his mercy. As soon as Pisistratus gains insight into the gravity of the situation, he comes to Fanny's rescue in time to prevent Francis from achieving his wicked aim, and thus, defend Fanny from all shame. This reprehensible situation leads Roland, Francis' father, to curse his own son for his evil nature and even deny, on some occasions, that he has ever had a son. Roland's resentment as a father and Francis' corresponding fear and embarrassment as a son are not entirely unlike those of Bulwer-Lytton and Robert as revealed in the letters that followed some of their frequent rows. Bulwer-Lytton complained profusely about his son's dissolute habits and erratic behaviour, and even blamed him for being the main cause of his declining health. For his part, Robert usually met his father's continuous reproaches with regret, struggling hard to redeem his guilt and reform his behaviour in the light of his father's advice.

Like Robert Lytton, who, in real life, accepted his responsibility and moved to Washington in an attempt to change his ways, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Francis Vivian also repents and finds his redemption leaving England for Australia to become a man of the colonies. Hence, through the example of Francis Vivian in the novel, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to illustrate the defiant and passionate personality which he was afraid his son

Robert would acquire, and which, in his view, necessarily needed improvement. Bulwer-Lytton thus envisioned the character of Francis Vivian as the embodiment of an unrestrained sort of masculinity, which menaced the prevailing politics of sexuality, inasmuch as also did the personifications of emasculation discussed above. Given his dubious origins, Francis initially hides his true identity by using a false name, and despite his good looks and cleverness whereby he manages to bewitch all of those around him, he is definitely presented as someone who is, for the most part, not to be trusted. As a case in point, Francis' sort of unfettered sexuality comes to the fore most noticeably when he is described in analogy with a threatening wild dog:

He has an expression of countenance very much like that of Lord Hertford's pet blood-hound, when a stranger comes into the room. Very sleek, handsome dog, the blood-hound is certainly – well-mannered, and I dare say exceedingly tame, but still you have but to look at the corner of the eye, to know that it is only the habit of the drawing-room that suppresses the creature's constitutional tendency to seize you by the throat, instead of giving you a paw.⁵⁸

In this respect, this sort of untamed masculinity, in the case of Francis Vivian, is necessarily discarded as Pisistratus makes progress on his way towards acquiring his individuality as a man. For the most part, Francis Vivian acquires a spectral quality that impedes Pisistratus' full realisation, and significantly, it is not until they dissociate from each other that Pisistratus can attain adulthood and emerge according to the standards of masculinity that are defended in the novel. Pisistratus' comradeship with his cousin thus comes to an end when Francis expires in Australia, after he has redeemed himself for all his sins. Significantly, it is only then – in Francis' absence – that Pisistratus begins to displace his affection towards Francis' sister, Blanche, whom he will eventually marry.

Inculcating models of masculinity and male prototypes

In the course of his coming-of-age, Pisistratus is also exposed to other models of masculinity with the view that he will choose the one that was acquiring increasing

⁵⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 359.

prevalence at the time, and which Bulwer-Lytton wished his son Robert would also adopt. In this respect, as the author of *The Caxtons* claims in the preface to the novel,

Pisistratus [...] becomes the specimen or type of a class the numbers of which are daily increasing in the inevitable progress of modern civilisation [...] he is the representative of the exuberant energies of youth, turning, as with the instinct of nature for space and development, from the Old World to the New.”⁵⁹

In this sense, according to Peter Sinnema, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *The Caxtons* “recalls young men to colonial duty,”⁶⁰ and hence, defends a particular type of masculinity which was being particularly encouraged at the time. Pisistratus thus becomes the epitome of this ‘new’ man as he comes of age in search of an independent masculine identity.

On his way to male growth, Pisistratus is thus exposed to different sorts of masculinities through a process that Peter Sinnema calls “homosocial mentoring,”⁶¹ whereby Pisistratus acquires his male identity through associating with different male mentors that personify different models of masculinity. As Sinnema further claims, Pisistratus, as a male hero, is homosocialised by being mentored into masculinity,⁶² and through this educational process, Pisistratus is prevented from adopting those types of masculinities that, in Bulwer-Lytton’s view, were meant to be discarded. Pisistratus is thus discouraged to endure emasculation – like his father Augustine – or conversely, acquire unrestrained masculinity – like his cousin Francis – and join, instead, the sort of manliness that was being promoted through the colonial discourse prevailing at the time. Those men acting as mentors to Pisistratus are, for the most part, his aging male relatives – that is, the three Caxton brothers, his father Augustine, and his uncles Roland

⁵⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Preface.” *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 4.

⁶⁰ Peter Sinnema. “Between Men: Reading the Caxton Trilogy as Domestic Fiction.” (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 197.

⁶¹ Peter Sinnema. “Between Men: Reading the Caxton Trilogy as Domestic Fiction.” (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 194.

⁶² Peter Sinnema. “Between Men: Reading the Caxton Trilogy as Domestic Fiction.” (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004): 195.

and Jack – each of whom, respectively, stands for a different male prototype. Augustine Caxton devotes all his time to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom; Jack desperately hopes to become rich through a stroke of luck; and Captain Roland, as a soldier, praises the values of courage and honour above all. As evidence of the different masculinities they represent, the personalities of the three characters are made to develop by their adoption of contrasting attitudes regarding a silver medal with which Roland has been decorated in the army. In this respect, Augustine Caxton states that, “my brother [Roland] values this piece of silver, which may be worth about five shillings, more than Jack does a goldmine, or I do the library of the London Museum.”⁶³ Roland is thus presented as a man of action that praises the values attached to the medal, as opposed to his brother Augustine, whose foremost interest lies in the world of thought, while Jack is mostly concerned to reap the profits of any business that may come to hand.

Pisistratus is thus exposed to these alternative types of masculinities in clear resemblance with the way Bulwer-Lytton’s son, Robert, also grew up in the shadow of his aging male relatives – mostly his father Edward, and his uncles, William and Henry. Given their respective personalities, in the Caxton brothers, Bulwer-Lytton seemed to embody the different masculinities that he and his brothers apparently adopted in real life. Since childhood, Bulwer-Lytton showed a precocious interest in literature and metaphysics, which would eventually lead him to become a highly-acclaimed man of letters. As indicative of Bulwer-Lytton’s aptitudes, in the novel, Augustine Caxton also presents a lifetime vocation to study and finish writing his great philosophical work. Alternatively, Bulwer-Lytton’s brother, Henry, began a prosperous career as a diplomat, in clear resemblance to his fictionalised counterpart, Roland, who travels around the world on behalf of his country. Likewise, Jack Caxton and his eagerness to become rich in the novel are also reminiscent of Bulwer-Lytton’s eldest brother, William, and his concerned attitude towards money. In fact, William always complained about his lack of money due to the fact that his youngest brother, Bulwer-Lytton, was chosen by their mother as heir to Knebworth, even though, he – William – was the eldest sibling in the

⁶³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 56.

family. In this respect, in his letters to his youngest brother, William often made reference to the fact that, because of his lack of means, he had been totally unable to make himself a name in politics.⁶⁴ Hence, there are some notable parallelisms established between the Caxton brothers – Augustine, Roland and Jack – and Bulwer-Lytton himself and his respective brothers, William and Henry.

Like Pisistratus in the novel, Robert also had all these models of masculinity available to choose from, and in his youth, owing to the idolatry he always coveted towards his father as a man of letters, Robert looked forward to choosing a literary career with a view to ingratiating himself with him. However, even though Robert never relinquished his ambition for a literary career, Bulwer-Lytton always met his son's literary vocation with profound displeasure. Apparently, Bulwer-Lytton was reluctant to find any original talent in his son as a poet, and given his own experience as a prolific writer, he thought that a literary career was incompatible with any other regular occupation, as he essentially envisioned the Poet as a man apart. As shown through the example of Pisistratus in his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton seemed to have other plans for his son instead of those of emulating his own profession as a writer. Hence, just as in the novel Pisistratus rejects his father's intellectual vocation in favour of beginning a new life in Australia, Bulwer-Lytton also had in mind that his son would choose a diplomatic career to become an exponent of the new young men that began to proliferate in the colonies of the British Empire. As usual, in spite of his initial reluctance, Robert acquiesced and began a successful career as a diplomat, achieving distinction as an ambassador, and even, ultimately, becoming Viceroy of India. Nonetheless, despite ultimately complying with his father's wishes, Robert found it hard to subdue his volition in favour of that of his father, as he unveiled in a letter to his wife Edith Villiers, thus highlighting his father's peculiar temperament:

My father is certainly a man of genius and, like many others of that unstable race, he looks upon himself as entitled to expect from others unusual appreciation and respect for what is admirable in his mind and character, and

⁶⁴ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 4.

unusually large allowances for all that is not admirable in his conduct and behaviour.⁶⁵

The dilemma that Robert had to face when he decided to follow his father's demands and suppress his own wishes only found some liberation when, later in life, Robert published some poetry under the pseudonym of Owen Meredith, thereby hiding his true identity, for fear of upsetting his father, even when Robert was well into his manhood. The emotional dependence on his father that Robert would always show became manifest most strongly when Bulwer-Lytton died at the time Robert had turned forty years of age. In fact, according to critics like Leslie Mitchell, it seems that Robert did not reach actual maturity until the moment his father passed away, as most of Robert's life had been subordinated to his father's will.⁶⁶ Robert's ultimate homage to his father was to take over the task of finishing his uncompleted autobiography, thus ultimately making use of his literary talent to render tribute to the life of his most highly-esteemed, but also feared, mentor.

The relationship that Poe maintained with John Allan resembled that of Bulwer-Lytton and his son Robert, as John Allan and Poe grew increasingly apart from each other, mostly owing to Poe's erratic ways even in the prime of his adulthood. However, in spite of the dissipated ways that used to characterise his youth, Robert Lytton was most eager to comply with his father's demands and follow his advice as a dutiful son. Accordingly, as opposed to Poe and John Allan, Robert Lytton, for most of his life, tried to emulate his father, evincing continuous signs of admiration and respect for him as he grew older. For Robert Lytton, his father, Bulwer-Lytton, would mostly remain a model of manhood to imitate, while Poe would regard John Allan as a bitter reminder of the bright future that he was eventually forced to leave behind. In this sense, through the perspective of his son Robert, Bulwer-Lytton was regarded as the embodiment of a father figure to be praised and respected, while Poe – even if being roughly the same

⁶⁵ Robert Lytton. "Letter from Robert Lytton to Edith Lutyens." 12th July 1865. Quoted in Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London: 2003): 82.

⁶⁶ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 84.

age that Bulwer-Lytton was at the time – would still remain in the role of a defiant son for most of his life. When Poe was already in his mid-thirties and wrote his tale “The Black Cat,” he still found himself, financially and emotionally, utterly dependent on others, especially on his mother-in-law, as the letters he addressed to Maria Clemm at the time repeatedly corroborate. In this respect, Poe metaphorically personified the figure of the eternal son, as his erratic behaviour often rendered him either reluctant or incapable of adopting a responsible attitude that would generally be considered more in tune with his age. Conversely, when Bulwer-Lytton was well over forty and began to write his domestic trilogy, in his fiction he rather adopted the exemplary role of a father figure, mostly in the guise of Augustine Caxton. Precisely, in order to set an example for his son, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned his character Pisistratus to be the protagonist of his domestic novel *The Caxtons*, while he conversely created his character Francis Vivian, Pisistratus’ defiant cousin, as an example that his son Robert should only be encouraged to disregard.

Given the opposition established between Pisistratus Caxton and Francis Vivian in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, it is significant to notice that Poe was compared, at some point in his life, with Bulwer-Lytton’s erratic hero – Francis Vivian – in his novel *The Caxtons*. In the infamous obituary that Poe’s literary executor, Rufus Wilmot Griswold, wrote on account of Poe’s death, not only did he offer a sketch of Poe’s life that would ultimately contribute to shaping Poe’s dark legend, but Griswold also included an extensive quotation – taken from Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *The Caxtons* and describing the character of Francis Vivian – which, according to Griswold, fitted in perfectly with the description of some traits that characterised Poe’s personality. In Griswold’s words,

He [Poe] was in many respects like Francis Vivian in Bulwer’s novel of *The Caxtons*. “Passion, in him, comprehended many of the worst emotions which militate against human happiness. You could not contradict him, but you raised quick choler; you could not speak of wealth, but his cheek paled with gnawing envy. [...] He had, to a morbid excess, that desire to rise which is vulgarly called ambition, but no wish for the esteem or love of his species; only the hard wish to

succeed – not shine, not serve – succeed, that he might have the right to despise a world which galled his self-conceit.”⁶⁷

In resemblance with the character of Francis Vivian in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, Griswold also portrayed Poe as an ambitious man who had the passionate wish to succeed in all his endeavours, even if, in Griswold’s view, these endeavours were often deprived of any clear moral purpose. In the course of the so-called ‘Ludwig’ article, as it was written under this pseudonym, Griswold gave an account of some relevant events in Poe’s life that, later on, were discovered to be groundless. Poe himself was to blame, as, if necessary, he was keen on inflating his own biographical background.

As a case in point, Poe felt the need to lie about his actual age even when he was merely in his early thirties. In this respect, in 1841, Rufus Wilmot Griswold, who would eventually become the editor of Poe’s works, asked the Bostonian writer to provide him with an autobiographical note for his upcoming anthology entitled *The Poets and Poetry of America*, published in 1842. In the manuscript of this memorandum,⁶⁸ Poe himself ascertained that he was born in January 1811, despite the fact he had actually been born two years before, thus claiming himself to be younger than he actually was. Likewise, some years later, in a letter also addressed to Rufus Wilmot Griswold, Poe modified his age even further, stating that he was four years younger than he actually was, thus claiming: “It is a point of no great importance – but, in one of your editions, you have given my sister’s age instead of mine. I was born December 1813 – my sister January 1811.”⁶⁹ Poe’s insistence on faking his actual age cannot possibly be gratuitous, as he carefully draws Griswold’s attention to it, serving the purpose of rendering himself slightly younger, and therefore, revealing a growing concern about his process of aging.

Through these writings, Poe presented himself as younger than he actually was, thus ultimately showing his concern about his process of aging. For the most part, Poe appeared to be much in the role of a careless son, as in the prime of his manhood, he

⁶⁷ Rufus Wilmot Griswold. “Death of Edgar A. Poe.” (9th October 1849. *New York Daily Tribune*): 2, col. 4.

⁶⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. “Memorandum - Autobiographical Note.” (J.A. Harrison. Ed. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. 1: Biography*. New York: T.Y. Crowell: 1902): 343-346.

⁶⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Rufus Wilmot Griswold.” (May 1849. See *Poe’s Letters on the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*).<www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4905000.htm>

still displayed a great sense of dependence on others, and his erratic conduct often seemed to call into question his identity as an adult man. Likewise, when he was well into his thirties, he was striving to make a name for himself as a man of letters, moving from place to place, struggling hard to earn a living and writing pitiful letters addressed to his aunt Maria Clemm and his friends, mostly asking for money. In the course of his letters, he also repetitively declared himself to be seriously ill and exhausted, giving much evidence of his weakness and fragility despite his significant youth. Consequently, Poe also constructed an image of himself that was pitiful, dependent, and fragile, as, he felt deeply overwhelmed by the circumstances that befell him, circumstances which seemed to render him prematurely aged. In a way, Poe did not appear to act the age he truly was, as Poe alternatively seemed to act younger or older than he actually was, ultimately showing age to be a construct.

The constructive nature of aging that transcends from Poe's statements in his letters can also be extended to issues concerning his masculinity. As a case in point, the obituary that Rufus Griswold wrote on account of Poe's death is also a useful narration of Poe's lifetime aspirations, as well as of Poe's hoaxes, unveiling his attempts at constructing his own manliness. In this respect, Poe was significantly concerned to give his public image special relevance, claiming that he was a man of noble origins and forging for himself an admirable background in search of social praise and respect when he found himself lacking in those qualities. In the 'Ludwig' article, Griswold describes Poe's parental background, with references to those relatives of Poe who attracted more public attention in his endeavours, such as his paternal grandfather, General Poe, as well as his foster father, John Allan. Likewise, instigated by Poe himself, Griswold, also claimed that Poe had travelled widely in his life visiting countries such as Greece and Russia. Nonetheless, evidence corroborates that Poe had merely claimed his brother Henry's adventurous journeys for his own, thus showing his lifetime tendency to forge some aspects of his biography and construct his own male identity either as a man of action, as a man of noble origins, or as a highly-educated man.

As Griswold also unveils in his article, Poe was exposed to different models of manhood throughout his life, which he seemed to adopt or reject at his convenience. As

a case in point, Poe's paternal grandfather, General Poe, was a distinguished veteran of the American Revolution, as he served as deputy quartermaster general for Baltimore during the war.⁷⁰ In an attempt to follow the trace of his grandfather's success as a soldier, Poe also enlisted in the army under the false name of Edgar A. Perry and served two years. Once he left the army, Poe obtained an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, but, owing to the lack of discipline he openly displayed, Poe was soon dismissed from his service as the army did not seem to come up to his expectations. Moreover, Poe was also concerned to make others believe that he had travelled extensively to many countries around the world. However, with the exception of his trip to Great Britain with the Allans in his youth, Poe never left the country of his birth. Accordingly, Poe seemed rather to appropriate his elder brother's wide experience as a traveller as if it were his own, since, in the course of his short life, William Henry Poe had worked as a crewman in a frigate and had visited distant and exotic places such as the Near East, the West Indies, Montevideo, the Mediterranean, and Russia.

Notwithstanding, above all, Poe had always aspired to become a Southern gentleman like his foster father John Allan and live a comfortable life without economic constraints, acquiring the social status that would attract praise and respect from others. Moreover, Poe also nurtured the ambition to become John Allan's heir, just as his foster-father had himself inherited the fortune of his own uncle, William Galt. And yet, the continuous disagreements taking place between Poe and John Allan, owing principally to Poe's dismissal of his foster-father's stern guidance, also seemed to recall the arguments that frequently broke out between Poe's paternal grandfather and his biological father, since, in fact, Poe's biological father decided to abandon a career in law to become an actor, even though this went against his father's wishes. In this respect, Poe's insubordinate nature also bore some resemblance to the character of his biological father.

⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that his grandson, Edgar, would even inflate that role stating that his grandfather had served as quartermaster general of the United States Army.

Nonetheless, Poe was also significantly ambitious, and when he was rejected as prospective heir by his foster-father, he felt the need to pursue a profession of his own. Poe was far from personifying the figure of the self-made man, unlike his cousin and lifetime rival, Neilson Poe, who, as a lawyer, journalist and editor, seemed more likely to typify the category of a successful professional man. However, even though he was not a businessman like his cousin Neilson, Poe was not totally unfamiliar with the world of trade and industry. He had been brought up by a successful businessman, John Allan, who, together with his partner Charles Ellis, had made themselves a brand name within the Richmond industry of tobacco. Likewise, Poe might have also been well-aware of the increasing importance attached to the figure of the self-made man at the time, in contrast with that of the gentrified Southern gentleman that prevailed in former times. In this respect, on his own terrain, Poe also pursued a professional career of his own since, as an editor, he always showed his firm intention of launching his own magazine.

Poe was thus exposed to different models of masculinity and tried to emulate some of the models of manliness that his male relatives appeared to personify. For example, Poe joined the army as had his paternal grandfather, he aspired to become a Southern gentleman as heir to his foster father, he tried to emulate the ways of his cousin Neilson as a self-made man, and he also acquired the bohemian and rebellious spirit that characterised his biological father. And yet, despite all these typologies of masculinity, he seemed to adopt – as a soldier, a Southern gentleman, a self-made man, and a rebel – for the most part Poe looked for his own model of masculinity, aiming to construct a male self through literature and trying to find in it his own distinctive male identity. As Leland Person claims, not only did Poe seek to make a living through literature, but he also constructed a male self through his writing.⁷¹ Consequently, Poe made use of literature to grant himself a public image as a man of letters,⁷² thus aiming to construct a public persona and a social status of his own. In this respect, taking literature as a source of social distinction, Poe tried to align himself with highly-revered writers of the time such as Charles Dickens, whom he met personally and who also

⁷¹ Leland S. Person. "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions." *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 153.

⁷² J. Gerald Kennedy. *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987): 97.

happened to be one of Bulwer-Lytton's closest friends. According to Dawn Sova, it can be argued that it was in Charles Dickens' novel *Barnaby Rudge* – which Poe reviewed in 1842⁷³ – that the American writer seemed to find the inspiration for his mournful poem “The Raven,” which he published in 1845.⁷⁴ In this respect, insofar as Poe's most highly-acclaimed poem pays homage to the raven appearing in *Barnaby Rudge*, Poe also looked to Dickens in order to emulate all that the English novelist stood for as a highly-revered writer, who had made of his writing a rewarding profession. Nonetheless, just as from his meeting with Dickens Poe did not reap the profit he had anticipated, “The Raven,” as a reminder of Poe's failed prospects, also acquires a particular mournful tone. Poe's raven thus underscores a sense of pervasive doom that appeared to haunt its creator permanently like an ill omen, which is the same psychological state that is also experienced by the narrator and his pet cat in Poe's tale “The Black Cat.” In the end, the raven in Poe's poem symbolises a sense of irretrievable loss, which, in this particular context, reflects Poe's fruitless quest to regain his noble origins and attain the social status that he was aiming for.

Poe would always consider the fact of establishing himself as an independent editor as a way to attain social respect and assert his masculinity. As Leland Person argues, at the time, manliness was increasingly defined in economic terms, and Poe's solution to appease his career anxiety lay precisely in creating his own literary journal so as to become an independent professional.⁷⁵ In Poe's contemporary society, one of the markers of successful manhood involved possessing a secure job, and according to Anthony Rotundo, in the nineteenth-century, middle-men's work was inherent in order to define who they were, even to the extent of claiming that, “if a man was without business, he was less than a man.”⁷⁶ The fact that Poe, in spite of his lifetime ambition to pursue this goal, was never able to launch his own journal placed him in an awkward

⁷³ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Works*. (New York: Facts on Life, 2001): 69.

⁷⁴ Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Works*. (New York: Facts on Life, 2001): 69.

⁷⁵ Leland S. Person. “Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions.” (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 154.

⁷⁶ E. Anthony Rotundo. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993): 168.

position. Poe's choice to commit himself to the literary profession seemed a risky way to earn a living, as he felt, in many periods of his life, economically dependent upon others. In fact, as Anthony Rotundo further claims, Americans perceived some professions as being more or less manly,⁷⁷ and a career that was associated with the arts was generally considered eminently feminine. In this respect, owing to cultural prejudices, Poe's career as a man of letters seemed to relegate him to a feminine sphere by the gender standards of the time.

Taking into consideration these prevailing perceptions of masculinity and the circumstances befalling him as a family man with a career in the arts, Poe resented a pervasive sense of emasculation that comes to the surface in his tale "The Black Cat." The narrator's wife initially points at the association traditionally established between cats and witches, which, ultimately, gives way to what is perceived as an intrinsic bond between cats and the female sex. In this respect, Pluto, the black cat of the tale, personifies the narrator's constant fear of emasculation as well as his latent feeling of decline as he spends his days in the home – a sanctuary of femininity that he shares with his wife. In what he perceives as a stifling atmosphere, the narrator feels the need to counteract its effects and, to this end, the narrator confesses that "Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish – [...] began to experience the effects of my ill temper."⁷⁸ The narrator feels the need to destroy Pluto as he perceives it as an embodiment of his latent feeling of decline and emasculation, given the animal's intrinsic association with the female sex.

Initially, living in permanent domesticity, the narrator presents himself as a gentle family man who feels hopelessly devoted to the care of his pets, while he also seems to lack any particular profession, which contributes to intensifying his sense of fragility. Nonetheless, as he confesses utilising a penknife as a weapon to hurt Pluto, it is likely that the narrator is pursuing a literary career, thus making use of his writing in

⁷⁷ E. Anthony Rotundo. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993): 170.

⁷⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Black Cat." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches, 1843-1849*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 851.

order to fight against his pervasive feeling of dependence. However, despite his efforts to get rid of the animal, the black cat continually reminds the narrator of his life in domesticity and his fear of emasculation, as the narrator spends most of his days at home and seems to hardly fit into his alleged role as breadwinner. Precisely as a result of the narrator's process of emasculation, which goes hand-in-hand with his intemperance, the narrator begins to loathe his life in the home, while his formerly-beloved 'pet' gradually transforms into a real 'pest.'

Actually, in spite of the narrator's violent displays of aggressiveness against his pet in attempts to prove his manliness and defy the haunting ghost of emasculation, the black cat always seems to riposte his attacks and even appears to mock the narrator's recurrent efforts aimed at its own destruction. In fact, even after the narrator mutilates and hangs the cat, ultimately causing its death, he still admits that "for months [he] could not rid [himself] of the phantasm of the cat."⁷⁹ The narrator's permanent sense of haunting reaches a point at which it is the black cat that ultimately raises its accusatory voice to condemn the narrator for his final crime. In his indefatigable attempt to get rid of the black cat, and thereby destroy the ghost of emasculation, the narrator eventually kills his wife as he mistakes her for the animal. Hence, it is ultimately the cat that stands by the corpse of his wife to remind the narrator of his final defeat: the impossibility of his escaping the ghost of emasculation despite his recurrent attempts.

The black cat unleashes chaos in the narrator's home, and in this sense, it becomes a catalyst that contributes to obliterating any definite role assigned to men and women that is based on gender difference. In this respect, as these roles are blurred, identities based on gender are also proved to be slippery. Actually, even if the narrator is the man of the family, he is gradually deprived of his strength and authority, as he undergoes a process of feminisation, while his wife begins to exert a hypnotic effect on him as her words about cats and witches seem to leave an indelible imprint on his mind. Likewise, as if haunted, the narrator begins to fall prey to this blurring of identities, as he mistakes the second cat with the white blotch for the first cat, and subsequently, in

⁷⁹ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Black Cat." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – Vol. III: Tales and Sketches, 1843-1849*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the University of Harvard Press, 1978): 853.

the same way, he also mistakes his beloved wife for the cat he loathes so fervently. Similarly, roles are also exchanged as the black cat moves from sufferer to accuser, while the narrator is likely to turn from hangman of the cat into victim of the gallows himself, when his crime is ultimately discovered.

Like cats and dogs: pets as catalysts of domesticity

As an eminently domestic novel, *The Caxtons* often depicts scenes of family life in which the presence of domestic animals, mainly dogs, acquire special relevance. Bulwer-Lytton would often associate being in the company of pets like dogs with an idealised picture of family life. For Bulwer-Lytton, dogs would always remind him of life in domesticity and the apparent peace and quiet that he had initially expected to find in the home. This association was mostly rooted in his early personal memories as a newlywed man and the hopeful prospects of happiness that he had placed in his marriage to Rosina. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton's wife had nourished a particular fondness for dogs, and while in the home, as an already-married woman, she would often be seen constantly surrounded by her pet dogs.

In the first years of their marriage, while Bulwer-Lytton was constantly engaged in literary drudgery in order to earn a living for his new family, Rosina would often remain detached from her husband, and especially, from her children, in the sole company of her pet dogs. Soon after the birth of both Emily and Robert, the children were separated from their parents at an early age, presumably owing to their mutual lack of parental warmth, as well as to Bulwer-Lytton's conspicuous jealousy. In this respect, critics like Leslie Mitchell, go so far as to claim that, in her assumed lack of maternal affection, Rosina would often show her affection more openly to her dogs than to her own children,⁸⁰ transposing her maternal feelings to her pets, and thus, engaging in a sort of surrogate motherhood. As a case in point, even Bulwer-Lytton's long-time friend Benjamin Disraeli took early notice of Rosina's overstated affection for her dogs when he became a regular visitor to their house in Hertford Street once the couple moved to

⁸⁰ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and the Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2003): 67.

London, two years after their marriage. In this respect, in one of his letters, Disraeli portrayed his friend's wife, Rosina, upon one of his visits to the couple, stating that "Mrs Bulwer was a blaze of jewels and looked like Juno; only instead of a peacock she had a dog in her lap called Fairy."⁸¹ This mythical comparison, as well as what is a sarcastic picture of Rosina as witnessed by Disraeli, corroborates the fact that Rosina's pet dogs were bound to take the place of her children in, at least, the overt display of her affections.

And yet, Bulwer-Lytton's compulsive association of Rosina and her dogs with an idealised vision of domestic life had begun to take shape even before they got married. In the course of their turbulent engagement – cancelled at different points only to be renewed again – and even during the early years of their married life, Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina exchanged numerous letters that give evidence of their true affection, despite the troublesome ending that was to await their ill-fated marriage. Through their letters, Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina made a recurrent use of distinctive endearing terms to address one another in their writings. In addition to creating a mutual bond of intimacy between both partners, the codified use of these endearing terms also involved the creation of alternative roles that both partners adopted in the affected exchanges of their romantic letters. Significantly, Bulwer-Lytton constantly addressed his wife Rosina using the endearing term 'my dearest poodle,' while he would often sign his letters under the pen name of 'puppy' or even that of 'your own pup.' Bulwer-Lytton felt the need to call each other using endearing names in a display of domesticity, and he would also extend this habit to the way they referred to their children. In this respect, in a letter he addressed to Rosina, dated 26th February 1829,⁸² which opens with the appellation of 'my own dearest, darling love and dearest poodle,' he even asked his wife to find a name by which they could call their daughter Emily, thus giving evidence of the

⁸¹ David Lytton Cobbold. *A Blighted Marriage: The Life of Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Irish Beauty, Satirist and Tormented Victorian Wife*. (Knebworth: Knebworth House Education and Preservation Trust, 1999): 4.

⁸² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to His Wife, Rosina." *Letters of the Late Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, to His Wife. With Extracts from her MSS Autobiography and Other Documents. Published in Vindication of Her Memory by Louisa Devey*. (New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1889): 374-375.

importance he attached to the use of alternative names to refer to his beloved ones in his private sphere.

Bulwer-Lytton's constant use of these affectionate appellatives – 'puppy' and 'poodle' – in the early intimate course of his relationship with Rosina would also find its reflection in the portrait of domestic life he would later envision in his novel *The Caxtons*. The scenes of homeliness that proliferate in the novel with the presence of little dogs as catalysts of life in domesticity reveal Bulwer-Lytton's memories of the early hopes he placed in his marriage to Rosina, and it is in this way that *The Caxtons* can be considered an edifying novel that extols the values of domesticity, especially as addressed to Bulwer-Lytton's son, Robert, who would find in Pisistratus a sort of fictionalised counterpart. Nonetheless, underneath this blissful picture of household events lies the haunting menace that necessarily brings to mind the latent failure of Bulwer-Lytton's own marriage. In this respect, not only can *The Caxtons* be considered an exemplifying model of domesticity from Bulwer-Lytton as a father to his son Robert, but it is also a note of caution to prevent his son from making the same mistakes in his prospective life as a married man.

In the novel, there are different instances in which young women are seen in the company of their pet dogs, taking care of them, and in so doing, also showing their affection towards them in an actual display of femininity and social position. Likewise, in the novel, pet dogs also play an important role in promoting social interactions that ultimately lead to the establishment of sentimental relationships. In fact, when Augustine Caxton recollects his encounter with the first woman he ever fell in love with, Ellinor, he recalls that, the first time that he saw her, she was in the company of her pet dog. Subsequently, as he remembers, it was owing to the fact that her little dog started running towards Augustine that Ellinor's attention was ultimately drawn to him, thus propitiating that they finally met each other. In this instance, the presence of a dog enables the social interaction between partners, as well as unveils a sort of femininity on account of its female owner, taking for granted Ellinor's identity as a sociable young woman belonging to the highly-born. Nevertheless, if there is a character that best exemplifies the sort of femininity and domesticity extolled in the novel and its symbolic

depiction through the presence of a pet dog, it is precisely the character of Blanche and her dog Juba.

As a young girl coming-of-age, Blanche is given an education pertaining to her sex and social class, learning some drawing and painting, as well as foreign languages, which turn her into an avid reader of novels, gradually growing into the habit of what her cousin Pisistratus scornfully calls 'idealising.' Regarded as a reprobate habit for a young girl, Pisistratus resolves to prevent her cousin Blanche from becoming "too dreamy and thoughtful,"⁸³ and thus decides to get her a dog on the understanding that she will no longer indulge so much in thought. In Pisistratus' estimation, his resolve soon has its effects as he realises that, from then onwards, "Blanche does not seem so eerie and elf-like [...] when Juba barks by her side."⁸⁴ Hence, in the company of her pet dog, through her coming-of-age, Blanche grows into gender and acquires feminine ways, learning to take good care of all those around her, and ultimately leaving aside her former habits of isolation and contemplation to interact socially. Pisistratus' action ironically meets an unexpected end, as he gradually grows jealous of the affection that Blanche increasingly places in her pet dog. As evidence of this, when Pisistratus returns from Australia as a prosperous self-made man, he realises that his young cousin Blanche has grown into a woman, and that, unexpectedly, she has become particularly fond of Juba, that is, the same dog that Pisistratus asked Blanche to take care of, with the mere aim that she would eventually leave behind her frequent episodes of nostalgia. Likewise, the change of attitude Pisistratus shows with regard to Blanche's pet dog is significant, inasmuch as it underscores a transformation in Blanche, as well as in Pisistratus' perception of her. At the time, Blanche has left behind the moody ways of her youth and has become more sociable, while she has also grown into adulthood and has also acquired a sort of coquettish womanhood as a socialite. Significantly, it is precisely on this account that Pisistratus feels more attracted towards Blanche, and in fact, Pisistratus seems to grow fonder of her, as, in her coquettish and sociable ways,

⁸³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 303.

⁸⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 304.

Blanche becomes more like his first love, Fanny Trevanion. And yet, at the same time, Pisistratus cannot help but find something reprehensible in her behaviour.

In the novel, this ambivalent feeling – of attraction and dislike towards Blanche – comes to the fore as soon as Pisistratus returns from Australia and encounters his fair cousin. After his long absence, Pisistratus is eager to see Blanche, but her dog, Juba, persistently gets in his way, preventing him from setting eyes on the woman that will eventually become his wife. On her way to adulthood, Blanche has acquired the womanly ways of a socialite belonging to the upper classes, as she is permanently accompanied by her pet dog as a sign of splendour. As a matter of fact, these are Pisistratus' thoughts moments before he sees Blanche after many years in her absence:

Come near – nearer – my cousin Blanche; let me have a fair look at thee. Plague take the dog! [...] Shall I not yet see the face! It is buried in Juba's black curls. Kisses too! Wicked Blanche! To waste on a dumb animal what, I heartily hope, many a good Christian would be exceedingly glad of!⁸⁵

Pisistratus thus shows his romantic feelings towards his cousin, but he also confirms his disapproval of Blanche's capricious ways and exaggerated displays of affection towards Juba. Sarcastically, Pisistratus' reaction at this point is significantly remindful of that of Bulwer-Lytton's frequent displays of jealousy with regard to his wife Rosina, as he noticed that she grew increasingly fond of her pet dogs, and to his detriment, she also spent more time with them than with him. Likewise, for Rosina, the presence of her pet dogs also involved a display of sumptuousness, thus marking her adherence to the aristocratic circles through her marriage to Bulwer-Lytton. Hence, Pisistratus' harsh dismissal of Blanche's affection for Juba underlines Bulwer-Lytton's painful memories of his life in domesticity with his wife Rosina in the company of her dog Fairy, but also his refusal of the sort of femininity that Bulwer-Lytton used to deplore in his wife.

In the novel, as there is extolled a particular type of manhood – for the most part, exemplified through Pisistratus – there is also a concrete model of womanhood that is preferred to others – as is the case with that of Blanche after Pisistratus' return to

⁸⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 468.

England. When she is in the company of her cousin Pisistratus, Blanche goes back to her meek and docile ways, embodying the values of 'the angel in the house,' marrying Pisistratus, and soon thereafter, becoming the mother of their first child. Both partners being cousins and of the same social condition, their marriage is regarded as both convenient and bound to bring happiness to each other. As a matter of fact, it is through the ultimate union of Pisistratus and Blanche in the novel that Bulwer-Lytton may have envisioned what, in his view, would be the appropriate marriage for his son Robert. Being of the same condition, and exemplifying a sort of masculinity and femininity that respectively complemented each other, the marriage between Pisistratus and Blanche is bound to be successful.

In his personal life, Bulwer-Lytton's concern to supervise his son's life also extended to clear expectations about a most convenient marriage. However, Bulwer-Lytton would take his son's negative responses to his recommendations as a direct affront. Worried about the fact that his son would repeat the same mistakes he had made with his wife Rosina, Bulwer-Lytton strongly advised his son Robert to marry well, and to that purpose, he ultimately adopted a stern behaviour with him, not unlike that which his own mother, Elizabeth Barbara, used to assume with himself in his youth. As a case in point, in 1859, when Robert had not even turned thirty years of age, Bulwer-Lytton prevented his son from marrying Caroline de Groenix, a girl belonging to a Dutch gentrified family, under the threat that, if he did not break off the engagement, the couple would have to depend on Robert's own salary as a diplomat, just like Elizabeth Barbara had threatened to disinherit her son, Bulwer-Lytton, on marrying Rosina. In the event, it was in 1864 when Robert ultimately got married to Edith Villiers, niece of an aristocrat, Lord Clarendon, without his father's consent. It was not until a grandchild had been born that the relationship between Bulwer-Lytton and the newlywed couple significantly improved, just as had happened with Elizabeth Barbara, and Bulwer-Lytton and Rosina, soon after the birth of their first child. Through his behaviour, Robert ultimately seemed to follow in his father's footsteps more faithfully than even Bulwer-Lytton would have liked to admit.

In his domestic novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton preached to his son on the way to a convenient marriage through the example of Pisistratus and Blanche. Nonetheless, even if by means of an ironic way, Bulwer-Lytton could not avoid making veiled references to the failure of his own marriage to Rosina. As a case in point, in a sarcastic scene in *The Caxtons*, Augustine Caxton reveals the key to a successful marriage. Given his wife's name, Kitty, Augustine draws a parallelism between cats and wives making reference to ancient Egypt in the following way:

The ladies of Bubastis, my dear, – a place in Egypt where the cat was worshipped, – always kept rigidly aloof from the gentlemen in Athribis, who adored the shrew-mice. Cats are domestic animals, your shrew-mice are sad gadabouts: you can't find a better model, any Kitty, than the ladies of Bubastis!⁸⁶

In this ironic scene, Augustine, as a scholar, preaches to his beloved wife on the necessity to remain apart from each other, in clear analogy to the tradition prevailing in ancient Egypt, whereby the ladies of Bubastis remained detached from the gentlemen of Athribis owing to the different domestic animals both sexes used to worship. As shown through this scene, Bulwer-Lytton recurs to the theme in the use of pets and their constant presence in the lives of married people. Nevertheless, it is significant to notice that Augustine advises his wife Kitty to imitate the ladies of Bubastis, who worshipped cats as their domestic animals instead of dogs, as was the case of Bulwer-Lytton's wife, Rosina. Bulwer-Lytton's irony further prevails in this scene, as, in addition to this veiled reference to his wife's obsessive fondness for dogs, Augustine Caxton actually admits that the best way to ensure the success of a marriage is to keep both partners away from each other.

In the course of their lives in domesticity, Poe and his wife Virginia lived in the company of Catterina, a large tortoiseshell cat that belonged to Poe and became Virginia's beloved pet until the last days of her life. Catterina remained in the Poe household during most of the ten years of their marriage, first in their home in Philadelphia, and later on, in the Fordham cottage in New York, where Virginia would

⁸⁶ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *The Caxtons: A Family Picture*. (New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1897): 137.

eventually pass away. Poe would always be fascinated by the cleverness that seemed to characterise their pet cat, even to the extent that he devoted one of his articles to describe Catterina's talents. In fact, in the course of his article, published in 1840, Poe extolled his cat's capacity to open the door of their kitchen on its own, praising Catterina's ability as a clear sign of instinct, which Poe defined as one of the most sublime forms of intellect. In this respect, Poe referred to his cat Catterina in the following terms:

The writer of this article is the owner of one of the most remarkable black cats in the world – and this saying much; for it will be remembered that black cats are all of them witches. The one in question has not a white hair about her, and is of a demure and sanctified demeanour.⁸⁷

In this article, written a few years before the publication of his tale "The Black Cat," Poe already referred to the intrinsic relation established between cats and witches, which happens to be an association that the narrator's wife also brings about in Poe's tale. In the light of his words, Poe perceived cats – and Catterina, in particular – as animals with an acute sense of instinct, which also appeared to be endowed with a sort of preternatural aura, especially in the case of black cats, which, as Poe claims, have been traditionally associated with magic and witchcraft.

For the most part, however, Poe would always associate his cat Catterina with home, domesticity, and the years of his life as a married man, given the fact that he grew used to seeing his wife Virginia spend her days in their home in the company of Catterina. As evidence of Virginia's fondness for her pet cat, on one occasion, Poe travelled to New York with his wife in 1844 and addressed a letter to Maria Clemm, stating that, "Sissy [Virginia] had a hearty cry last night, because you and Catterina weren't here."⁸⁸ In response to Poe's letter, Maria Clemm travelled to New York in the company of Catterina, so that Virginia would not have to remain apart from her cat for

⁸⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. "Instinct versus Reason – A Black Cat." (29th January 1840. *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* 4.5): 2, col. 6.

⁸⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (7th April 1844. Arthur Hobson Quinn, and Richard Hart. Eds. *Edgar Allan Poe: Letters and Documents in the Enoch Pratt Free Library*. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1941): 21.

too long. Judging from Poe's words in his letter, it seems that Virginia missed the presence of her pet cat terribly whenever she was far from home. In fact, the affectionate bond that joined Virginia and her cat would always stick in Poe's memory to the extent that he often associated one with the other. This fact would also transcend in his tale "The Black Cat," as the narrator's wife and her pet cat also present a particular bond that joins them together. The inherent relation between 'Virginia' and 'Catterina' is also echoed in the similarity that both their names present, which continuously reverberates and contributes to deepening further the bond that ties them together. The affection that Virginia showed for her pet cat and the way Poe regarded this affection seemed to undergo a transformation throughout Virginia's process of aging. Given Virginia's outstanding youth as a bride, her cat Catterina initially stood for her playful companion. Subsequently, as Virginia grew older, Poe was likely to think his wife indulged in a sort of surrogate motherhood with Catterina owing to the absence of any children in their home and the growing affection his wife showed towards their cat. Nonetheless, when Virginia fell seriously ill, her pet cat Catterina would mostly remind Poe of his wife's severe illness. Given the humble conditions characterising the Fordham cottage where the Poes lived in New York, Catterina would become a source of physical warmth when Virginia shivered from cold in her frail condition. Consequently, for a long time, Poe would bear witness to Virginia's lying in bed in her delicate state with her pet cat on her breast until the last days of her life.

Poe seemed to have in mind the friendly bond that joined his wife Virginia with their pet cat Catterina in the domesticity of their home when he envisioned his tale "The Black Cat." In Poe's tale, there also lies an intrinsic relationship between the narrator's wife and the black cat. First, the narrator mistakes the cat for his wife to the extent that it is his wife that he kills instead of his pet cat, then the narrator also entombs the cat accidentally together with his wife's dead body, and finally, when the narrator profanes the tomb, his wife being dead, it is the cat whose screams ultimately disclose the narrator's crime from deep within the tomb. As the cat outlives the wife and gives voice to the crime committed, the cat seems to have taken possession of the wife's soul, which awakens to life in order to be avenged. There is, therefore, a necessary transposition

from the wife to the cat, and *vice versa*, from the cat to the wife, which seems to inevitably bind them together. In fact, given Virginia's delicate condition over an extended period of time, Poe was permanently tormented by the anguish of having to bear witness to the decline of his wife, while their pet cat Catterina remained as active and lively as always. In this respect, in Poe's mind, their loving black cat would eventually turn into a haunting menace and perpetual reminder of Virginia's critical condition. The image of Virginia lying in bed, with difficulty in breathing, owing to her consuming illness, while Catterina lay on her breast, would haunt Poe perpetually. Even if Catterina gave Virginia some physical warmth during her illness, its continuous presence in the sickroom became a latent menace, as if, in Poe's anguishing condition, it seemed it was actually Catterina which drained Virginia of her life, and, as if the black cat, as an embodiment of death, waited patiently to take possession of Virginia's soul. Poe's memories of Virginia with her cat Catterina would stick in his mind until the very last years of his life.

The close bond between the narrator's wife and the cat Pluto in the tale brings to mind the intimate relationship that Virginia had with her cat Catterina. As a case in point, Mary Neal Gove, who attended Virginia during her illness, took notice of the symbiosis between Poe's wife and her cat, when, in her account, she states that Virginia "lay in the straw bed, wrapped in her husband's great coat, with a large tortoise-shell cat in her bosom,"⁸⁹ thereby recording the intimacy that developed between Virginia and Catterina, particularly during the course of Virginia's ill condition. Focused on this inextricably close association between Virginia and her cat, Bonaparte elaborates a psychoanalytical interpretation of the tale based on the association between cats and female sexuality. According to Marie Bonaparte, "The Black Cat" presents one of the many avatars of the figure of the mother in Poe's tales, insofar as the cat is associated with the figure of 'the witch,' who is a symbolic embodiment of 'the wicked mother,'⁹⁰ while, drawing on sexual symbolism, the cat has often been considered a figurative

⁸⁹ Quoted in Marie Bonaparte. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. [Trans. John Rodker] (London: Imago, 1949): 458.

⁹⁰ Marie Bonaparte. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. [Trans. John Rodker] (London: Imago, 1949): 466.

representation of the female genital organs. As Bonaparte further claims, in spite of this eminently symbolic, feminine identity assigned by Poe to the cat in his tale, Pluto is nevertheless male, owing to the fact that, in the early stages of growing up, all male children believe that all creatures are made in their own image. However, their later discovery that the figure of the mother is deprived of a penis proves them to be wrong, and this awareness of their having made a mistake leads young boys to nourish a feeling of antipathy and rejection toward women in general. On this basis, Marie Bonaparte describes Poe's "The Black Cat" as a tale about the fear of castration, and in particular, the fear of both the castrated and the castrating mother.⁹¹ In fact, Poe's "The Black Cat" endorses the classical Oedipus myth, which Freud resorted to in order to develop his Oedipus complex. In the myth, Oedipus puts out his eyes in an action of self-punishment for his incest – blinding being a universal symbol of castration – while his mother, Jocasta, dies by hanging, which is unconsciously associated with the *rephallisation* of the victim. Following this plot closely, according to Bonaparte, "The Black Cat" turns into Poe's wish-phantasy of castration and *rephallisation* because of the lack of male potency he experienced at this stage of his life. In the tale, there are examples of castration, insofar as the narrator cuts out the cat's eye with a penknife and splits his wife's skull with an axe. The narrator also attempts *rephallisation*, insofar as there is the hanging of Pluto and the wife's body hung up behind the wall. However, any wish-phantasy of *rephallisation* comes to no avail in the story, as, eventually, from its tomb, the black cat opens its menacing jaws in a graphic display of the *vagina dentata*, which reiterates the impossibility of escaping castration.

In the context of the *fin-de-siècle* and decadence, as Bram Dijkstra claims, in literature as well as in the visual arts, fantasies regarding women's intrinsic connection with animals increased profusely, and in particular, the association of women with cats became virtually endemic,⁹² to the extent that even Poe admitted that "we apply the

⁹¹ Marie Bonaparte. *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*. [Trans. John Rodker] (London: Imago, 1949): 467.

⁹² Bram Dijkstra. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 288.

feminine gender and pronoun to cats, because all cats are ‘she.’”⁹³ Friedrich Nietzsche made reference to the Dionysian quality of the feminine in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872),⁹⁴ while, owing to the scientific context of Darwinian theories, it was held that, in times of decadence, women might even return to their bestial nature,⁹⁵ as there was the belief that it is women especially who are driven by animal desire and instincts. As Dijkstra further argues, narratives featuring female vampires proliferated in times of decadence, precisely as a result of a prevailing metaphorical fear amongst men of this feminine bestial nature – of finding jaws suggesting the *vagina dentata* concealed within their brides. These vampire narratives underscored fear of the degenerative and bestial tendencies in women, and manifested the pervasive, anti-feminine obsession that prevailed at the time. In fact, in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1882), the female vampire strongly resembles a monstrous cat, whereas in Bram Stoker’s seminal vampire novel *Dracula* (1897), the male villain feeds on the blood of young women, as it is taken for granted that an ancestral bestial quality is more likely to be found present in women. As a cautionary tale that warns about the danger of the anti-feminine woman – in clear reference to the emergence of the liberated New Woman prototype – Stoker’s *Dracula* presents the metaphorical domestication of a prototype of a liberated and promiscuous woman, Lucy Westerna, who, through her chastising murder by the action of her three suitors, turns into the ideal feminine icon of the *fin-de-siècle*, the ‘dead woman’ in her wedding gown. The male ideal of the ‘dead woman’ goes hand-in-hand with the male fantasy of the female vampire, as reflected in contemporary paintings such as Thomas Cooper Gotch’s *Death the Bride* (1895), and Emily Dickinson’s poems such as “Title Divine – Is Mine!” (c.1861), through well-known lines that speak of being “born – bridalled – shrouded in a day,” which underline the intricate connection between the figure of the bride and that of death. In the domesticity of the home, Poe might have envisioned his young, but agonising, wife, Virginia, as the epitome of the

⁹³ Edgar Allan Poe. “Desultory Notes on Cats.” (Philadelphia *Public Ledger*. 19th July 1844): 2, col. 4.

⁹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. [Trans. Douglas Smith] (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

⁹⁵ Bram Dijkstra. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 296.

docile and compliant figure of the ‘dead woman,’ but unconsciously, owing to the dreadful illness befalling her – that of tuberculosis and its symptoms, which sometimes involved the spitting of blood – his wife might also have reminded him, even if latently, of a menacing, female vampire, just waiting to reveal the other side of her nature when he was caught unawares. This perceived dual nature in women was synthesised in the seminal study by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in which they claim that “maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves,”⁹⁶ thus underscoring the coexistence of these two female archetypes of women threatening men.

Apart from her pet cat, in the course of her illness, Virginia was also in the constant company of Marie Louise Shew, who acted as her nurse in her final days. The strong physique and energy of the latter stood in sharp contrast with the fragile condition that characterised her patient, Virginia, in her condition. Both women personified opposing typologies of femininity. As a woman with some medical training, Marie Louise Shew exemplified the model of the New Woman, who had made a profession of the womanly care for others. Conversely, Virginia moved from exemplifying the figure of ‘the angel of the house’ to being an ‘invalid’ woman in constant need of care. In a short span of time, given her agonising illness, Virginia had gradually become transformed from a healthy, plump young woman into a haunting presence that would render Poe’s existence simply hopeless. Likewise, given Virginia’s exceptionally young age at the time of her death – she was scarcely twenty-four years old – through her death, Poe gained insight into his own process of aging. Even though Virginia was ostensibly younger than he himself, Poe had outlived her, becoming a widower when he had turned thirty-eight. Virginia’s loss involved a particularly anguishing event in Poe’s life, as it would render him aged and in perpetual remembrance of the past. Unable to face loneliness, Poe would look for women who would remind him of Virginia, such as Marie Louise Shew, since, shortly after Virginia’s demise, Poe started writing Marie Louise Valentine poems and passionate letters, and even, scarcely four months prior to Poe’s death, Poe addressed Marie Louise

⁹⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. (New Haven and London: Yale Nota Bene, 2000): xi.

Shew a pitiful letter in which he remembered he had “heard [her] greet [his] *Catterina*, but it was only as a memory.”⁹⁷ Poe still recollected the presence of his cat *Catterina* as Marie Louise Shew attended to an agonizing Virginia, and given the fact that it was Marie Louise Shew who spent most time at Virginia’s bedside as her personal nurse, it seems that Poe cherished the hope of being with Marie Louise, as if this would render him somehow closer to his late wife Virginia. Likewise, the presence of *Catterina*, the black cat, would also inevitably aid in haunting Poe and rendering Virginia’s memory even more vivid after her tragic bereavement, to the extent of becoming a metaphorical avatar of his late wife.

* * *

The domestic fictions of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe portray the process of aging and emasculation of individuals entrapped in the domestic scenario, through the characters of Augustine Caxton in *The Caxtons* and the narrator in “The Black Cat,” as suggestive of the domestic life in which the authors also engaged in the course of their respective marriages. The Victorian conceptualisations of masculinity that prevailed at the time – as symptomatic of the discourses pertaining to the social movement of Christian Muscularity and to the tenets of colonialism and imperialism – often associated masculinity with values that were, for the most part, connected with youth, and this conditioned the way that the process of male aging was perceived. In this sense, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *The Caxtons*, Pisistratus identifies two opposing embodiments of masculinity represented by his father, Augustine, as an intellectual man, and his uncle, Roland, as a man of action, ultimately choosing to follow the example of his uncle and become a man of the colonies, thus typifying the new type of masculinity emerging at the time, which Bulwer-Lytton particularly exalted for the youth. Conversely, in Poe’s tale “The Black Cat,” the narrator falls prey to the oppression of the home and undergoes a gradual process of emasculation, while he begins to nourish an

⁹⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Marie Louise Shew.” (June 1848. See *Poe’s Letters on the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4806000.htm>

unprecedented hatred for his pet, a black cat, which the narrator closely associates with his wife and his domestic life. The situation befalling the narrator in the tale brings to mind that of Poe during the course of his marriage, as he would often find himself economically dependent, mostly on his aunt Maria Clemm, while he would also find it hard to fit into any of the American models of masculinity that prevailed at the time, swinging unsuccessfully from that of the Southern gentleman to that of the self-made man. Likewise, given the peculiar idiosyncrasy that characterised the Allan household, the domestic roles were not clearly established and distributed among the family members, but were rather blurred and oscillated between the men and women of the family.

Through his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned a bright picture of family life that had been denied to him in his marriage to Rosina, while he paid homage to his daughter, Emily, after her premature death, and fictionalised his pedagogical guidance addressed to his son, Robert, as illustrated by Pisistratus Caxton, the protagonist of the novel. Having remained detached from his daughter for a long time, Bulwer-Lytton not only felt acute pain upon her premature demise, but was also overwhelmed by guilt, especially when Rosina accused him of having neglected his own daughter. The character of Blanche in the novel exemplifies the kind of femininity that Bulwer-Lytton would have mostly praised in his daughter Emily, as indicated in the letters that he wrote to her while she lived in Germany. Likewise, in his novel, Bulwer-Lytton also presented his son Robert with the kind of masculinity, exemplified by Pisistratus, which the author particularly extolled and wanted his son to pursue, as opposed to the erratic behaviour of Francis Vivian, which closely resembles that of Bulwer-Lytton's son, Robert, in some periods of his youth. Moreover, well aware of the importance attached to marrying well, especially given his tragic experience with his wife Rosina, through his domestic novel, Bulwer-Lytton also warned his son about the need to choose his wife wisely. In this respect, as coupled with the opposing models of masculinity represented by Pisistratus Caxton and Francis Vivian, in his novel, Bulwer-Lytton also provided differing prototypes of femininity exemplified by the female

characters of Blanche – characterised as obedient and compliant – and Fanny Trevanion – mostly considered whimsical and capricious.

In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Pisistratus Caxton is presented with three male mentors personifying three different types of masculinity, as is the case with his father Augustine – the intellectual – his uncle Roland – the soldier – and his uncle Jack – the entrepreneur or businessman. Likewise, in his life, Bulwer-Lytton was also exposed to these different kinds of masculinity as represented by male relatives, since his brother Henry began a career as a diplomat in resemblance with uncle Roland in the novel, while Bulwer-Lytton's brother William finds in uncle Jack from the novel his literary counterpart as an entrepreneur. As a writer, Bulwer-Lytton would feel mostly identified with Augustine Caxton, as he typifies the intellectual type, but, furthermore, as he also takes on the role of the father of his son Pisistratus. In analogy with Bulwer-Lytton, Poe would also be presented with different types of masculinities exemplified by male relatives, as is the case with that of the Southern gentleman – whom Poe aspired to emulate, as represented by his foster father, John Allan – that of the soldier – as personified by his paternal grandfather General Poe – and the American embodiment of the self-made man – mostly exemplified by his cousin, Neilson Poe. Throughout his life, Poe would switch roles – by joining the army, he aspired to become John Allan's heir, and, in his lifetime goal to establish his own literary journal, he also sought to emulate the entrepreneurial ways that characterised his cousin. Nonetheless, at quite an advanced age, Poe realised that he had failed in fulfilling any of these roles, while, according to the emerging tenets about a new type of masculinity that required men to possess important economic means as breadwinners, Poe's profession as a writer and editor relegated him to a precarious position, given his economic dependence and his enclosure in a domestic setting, which, by prevailing gender standards, threatened him with a symbolic process of emasculation.

In *The Caxtons* and "The Black Cat," the presence of dogs and cats as catalysts of domesticity becomes pivotal, inasmuch as they are clearly associated with female characters – as is the case with Kitty in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, and the narrator's wife in Poe's tale – while male characters also regard these pets as metaphorical

embodiments of the domestic space and their life in domesticity. The presence of dogs in the home of the Caxton family sanctions its characterisation as an example of a bright family picture, while, in contrast, the haunting presence of a black cat in Poe's tale unleashes the narrator's anger for his perpetual enclosure in what he perceives as a stifling domestic scenario. From a biographical perspective, even though both authors endured tragic experiences during their lives in domesticity – since Bulwer-Lytton had to witness the end of his marriage and the premature death of his daughter, while Poe attended to his wife in her illness through the last days of her life – the fictionalisations of their respective domestic experiences that both writers produced at the time differ quite significantly. Through the writing of his domestic novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned the blissful picture of family life that he had been denied, with the aim of establishing an edifying example for his son, Robert, while, in contrast, Poe tried to exorcise the haunting memories of his life in domesticity and of the premature death of his young wife. The fictionalisations of their lives in domesticity also underscore the different ways in which both authors approached their aging in the late years of their lives; Bulwer-Lytton would come to look upon his son Robert as the heir who would ensure the continuation of the Lytton family lineage and the prodigal son who would take care of him in his aging years, while, for Poe, the tragic demise of his wife at such a young age unleashed a metaphorical process of premature aging, as Poe would only outlive his wife by two years and he would die prematurely at the age of forty.

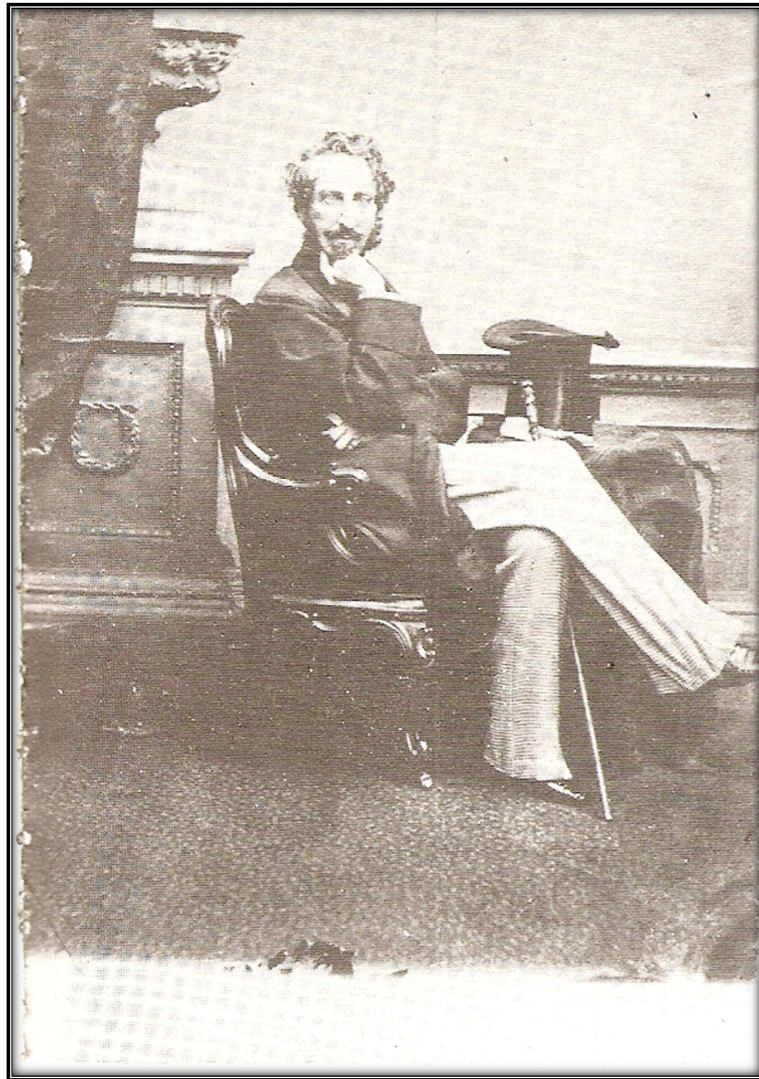


Figure 9 - Photograph of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, c.1855.

Taken from: Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury, UK: Shire, 1973): 35.

Chapter Seven

Psychosomatic Disorders and Doctoring 'the Self'

in *A Strange Story* and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"

In a relatively short span of time, Bulwer-Lytton's political career went through significant changes up until it was definitively drawn to a close, coinciding with the threshold of what could be regarded as the onset of his late years. The hectic pace that his political career had acquired when he was in his mid-fifties came hand-in-hand with the turmoil that characterised Bulwer-Lytton's personal life at the time, owing to his ever-troublesome relationship with his wife Rosina following their separation. Once he had changed factions to join the Conservative Party and became Member of Parliament for Hertford, in just a few years he was named Secretary of State for the Colonies during Lord Derby's administration, while he also had to face the debates and ultimate implementation of several reform bills with which he was not totally satisfied. Subsequently, to his contentment, when he turned sixty-three years of age, he was given a peerage and became a member of the House of Lords. Having successfully lived through years of incessant literary work undertaken to make ends meet during his marriage, there came a time when Bulwer-Lytton acknowledged the fact that he felt gradually drained of his health and strength, and he even considered the possibility of relinquishing his political duties.

His growing disaffection with politics and his eventual retirement from public life seemed to underpin the advent of Bulwer-Lytton's aging years. Leslie Mitchell claims that Bulwer-Lytton apparently resented the process of aging on the grounds that, having personified the figure of a dandy in his youth, as his literary character Henry Pelham exemplifies, and thus, having been well aware of the importance attached to

external appearances, it was assumed that ‘to grow old gracefully’ was simply out of the question for him. To use Leslie Mitchell’s words, “next to the dandy stood the hypochondriac,”¹ and consequently, it was no wonder that someone who had grown so concerned about his external looks also became significantly worried about the decline of his health and his aging process. In this respect, biographer Charles Snyder also claims that the approach of old age seemed to unsettle Bulwer-Lytton to the extent that even Benjamin Disraeli contemptuously stated that his friend Bulwer-Lytton always appeared to be mourning over his lost youth.² Nonetheless, in his political biography of Bulwer-Lytton, Charles Snyder also claims that, even though he seemed to take a rather inactive role in politics in comparison with previous years, when Bulwer-Lytton was nearly sixty, his ambition, far from diminishing, seemed to spur him on even further. In fact, it could be argued that his interests were merely transposed to other fields which, at the time, seemed to absorb most of his attention.

It was at this stage that he conceived the idea that gave rise to his novel *A Strange Story* (1862), which is significantly endowed with a clear metaphysical vein, inasmuch as, in the context of Darwinism and the increasing prevalence of materialism, through his novel, Bulwer-Lytton sought to espouse a religious thesis about the existence and immortality of the human soul, which definitely sanctioned his entrance upon the metaphysical novel at this stage of his life. In this sense, as James Campbell argues, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, *A Strange Story*, underscores the spiritual re-education of Allen Fenwick, the hero of the story, who, being a medical doctor showing a blind reliance on science and materialism, eventually succumbs to acknowledge the existence of the soul and the confirmation that some facts cannot be explained merely by the use of reason and science.³ In this respect, this late novel in Bulwer-Lytton’s literary career shows the author’s scepticism about Charles Darwin’s recently established theory of

¹ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 91.

² Charles Snyder. *Liberty and Morality: A Political Biography of Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1995): 198.

³ James Campbell. *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*. (Boston: Twayne, 1986): 124.

evolution in his seminal volume *On the Origin of Species* (1859), in addition to evincing his increasing interest in religion and the transcendence.

Bulwer-Lytton always seemed to regard his late novel *A Strange Story* with a significantly high esteem. In a letter to his son Robert, dated 14th September 1861, Bulwer-Lytton unveiled the distress that he felt in the midst of the writing process as well as the difficulties he encountered in bringing his narrative to a conclusion:

I am in the agonies of finishing my book in the last chapter, I hope, and whenever you read it you will see what throes that chapter must have caused in parturition. I fancy this will be my best work of imagination. I fancy it deals with mysteries within and without us wholly untouched as yet by poets. It is not my widest work, but I think it is perhaps the highest and deepest.⁴

Judging from his words, Bulwer-Lytton was well aware of the fact that he had left behind the realist mood that had generally characterised his previous novels to explore the realm of the imagination in this last phase of his literary career. His purpose, though, was not fulfilled without difficulties, and this may be due to the fact that his novel, in its aim to explore metaphysical realities, presented a more personal approach than it appeared to have at first sight. In this sense, upon the threshold of his sixties, Bulwer-Lytton's interests at the time shifted to a sort of personal spiritual re-education, which ultimately reflected his concern to address issues in relation to his physical health as well as his religious faith. In this respect, as Joseph Fradin asserts, at the time Bulwer-Lytton was moving beyond what he himself regarded as "the absorbing tyranny of everyday life"⁵ in an attempt to seek, in his consciousness, some power that would make the world that was disintegrating around him whole and complete.⁶ It is in this sense that *A Strange Story* may well acquire the category of metaphysical inasmuch as it seeks to transform the material and experiential into the visionary and ideal. In his structuralist study of the metaphysical novel, Edwin Eigner claims that, in these novels, experience

⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to his son, Robert." (14th September 1861. Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol.II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 345.

⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 268.

⁶ Joseph Fradin. "'The Absorbing Tyranny of Everyday Life: Bulwer's *A Strange Story*.'" (*Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16.1. June 1961): 13-14.

is first presented in purely materialistic terms which are then contradicted from an idealist perspective so that experience is ultimately transformed and a new sort of reality eventually emerges.⁷

As he usually did with most of his literary works, in the preface to his novel *A Strange Story*, Bulwer-Lytton also unveiled the purpose that lay beneath its creation. For the most part, he defended the use of the supernatural in his novel stating that its presence is acceptable in those works of the imagination in which Nature is approached through some sort of inner sense on the part of the individual that shows there must be something beyond Nature itself.⁸ In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton argues that it is the supernatural in the human being which ultimately contributes to proving the existence of the transcendent. In addition to the supernatural elements which pervade the novel, Bulwer-Lytton also referred to the underlying symbolical meanings that are conveyed through them in the narrative and which primarily turn it into a novel of ideas. In this sense, issues related to the material, intellectual, and visionary realities are discussed and brought into conjunction, ultimately pinpointing the necessary interrelation existing among them. As evidence of this, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned the main characters of the novel as personifying one of these ideas, thus bringing to the fore both the associations and contradictions established with regard to material, intellectual, and visionary subjects.

In a letter that he addressed to his friend Charles Dickens shortly before the publication of his novel *A Strange Story*, Bulwer-Lytton revealed the symbolic meanings attached to each of the main characters.⁹ In his words, the hero, Allen Fenwick, represents the intellectual type deprived of any spiritual dimension; conversely, the heroine, Lilian Ashleigh, is rather the spiritual type dispossessed of any intellectual turn, while Margrave, the villain of the narrative, is portrayed as the

⁷ Edwin M. Eigner. *The Metaphysical Novel in England and America: Dickens, Bulwer, Melville, and Hawthorne*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978): 9.

⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Preface to the novel." (Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story*. Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 7.

⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to His Friend Charles Dickens, Undated, but Established as Written around the End of 1861 or the Beginning of 1862." (Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol.II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 345.

sensuous incarnation of Nature itself. From Bulwer-Lytton's own perspective, the interaction established among these three characters all through the novel was intended to prove that "each has need of the other,"¹⁰ and that, ultimately, the mind, the soul and the body are all equally perceived as inherent to the human being. Precisely, the discourse referring to this tripartite structure, intrinsic to the individual, will serve the purpose of articulating this transitional moment in Bulwer-Lytton's life and its association with these three philosophical issues pertaining to the body, the mind, and the soul, which also typify the three main characters featured in this novel of ideas.

With regard to Poe, scarcely five years prior to his demise, he would acquire unprecedented fame, particularly through the publication of his poem "The Raven" (1845), which granted him instant success both at home and abroad. At the time, Poe was living with his family in New York, and, given his popularity as a writer, he began to take part in literary gatherings, and was invited to give a series of dramatised readings of his poems across the country. Poe also reached the summit of his career as an editor, when he became the sole owner of the *Broadway Journal*, and took advantage of his position to promote his own writings as well as to attain a larger readership for his tales. Nonetheless, this hectic and successful period in his career was overshadowed by a series of professional and personal conflicts that kept on haunting Poe, as if a perpetual sense of doom pervaded his existence, even when, in his late thirties, he should have been enjoying the recent achievements he had struggled so hard to attain.

Through his erratic conduct Poe paradoxically appeared to show contempt for the literary establishment that he seemingly aspired to join. As a matter of fact, in spite of his success, Poe began to evince professional jealousies from other editors and writers. As a case in point, even though Poe became closely acquainted with the poet Thomas Dunn English, some mutual hatred was unleashed between them when Poe began to mock his friend's poems in public. Poe's erratic displays of genius and anger, which correspondingly attracted admiration and hatred on equal terms, threatened to

¹⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to His Friend Charles Dickens, Undated, but Established as Written around the End of 1861 or the Beginning of 1862." (Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol.II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 346.

destabilise his position as editor and reputed author. Poe's inconsistent demeanour seemed to respond, for the most part, to the personal crisis he was undergoing given the serious condition befalling his wife at the time. Poe's tragic situation, which would become especially poignant during Virginia's illness and ultimate death, was likely to give rise to the actual 'imp of the perverse' that led him to indulge in drinking and drug abuse, to suffer from poor health and, in his desperation, even to attempt to commit suicide. From the first symptoms of Virginia's disease until her premature demise, Poe had to bear witness to the gradual deterioration of his wife's health for the span of five years. In the course of Virginia's ill condition, Poe went through intervals of utter depression and joyful hope as his wife recovered only to fall seriously ill again. As a matter of fact, Poe described his vexing condition that moved intermittently from hope to despair in a letter dated 4th January 1848, which he addressed to his friend John Ingram:

Each time I felt all the agonies of her death – and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more pertinacity. But I am constitutionally sensitive – nervous in a very unusual degree. I became insane, with long intervals of horrible insanity. [...] It was the horrible, never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could not longer have endured, without total loss of reason.¹¹

Judging from Poe's words, the fact of having to attend to his wife in the final years of her illness had a devastating effect on him, particularly, as, when he became used to the idea of her inevitable demise, her temporary recovery led him to cling to some hope only to discover next that the subsequent worsening of her condition filled him again with utter despair. Poe would outlive his wife for two years, and, during the five years he bore witness to his wife's illness, he grew accustomed to the presence of doctors and nurses in their home, as well as to the examination of symptoms on his wife's body to look for evidence that would help him determine her health condition. Although Poe appeared to be haunted by the ubiquitous presence of death for most of his life, it was

¹¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to John Ingram." 4th January 1848. Quoted in Dawn Beverly Sova. *Edgar Allan Poe – A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Work*. (New York: Facts on File, 2001): 53.

the first time that he had to live, day by day, with the permanent fear of losing his wife at such a young age.

Poe's anguishing situation at the time would find its reflection in his writings and, during the course of his wife's illness, he published the tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), whereby he revealed his familiarity with the medical profession and also explored the transient states befalling a patient, with which Poe had lately become so familiarised owing to his wife's disease. According to critic David Leverenz, in Poe's sensation tales – "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" being a case in point – the author depicts "a state of in-betweenness"¹² that the individual undergoes in order to explore the crossings between mind and body as well as between life and death. In order to focus on this transient condition, Poe resorted not only to his personal knowledge as carer of his wife, but also to the current popularity of mesmeric practices at the time. Poe's tale is told from the point of view of a professional mesmerist conducting a hypnotic experiment on his dying friend, Valdemar, who has agreed to be mesmerised on the point of death. As a hypnotist, the narrator intends to determine whether mesmerism can forestall death, and it is to that end that he conducts a mesmeric experiment on his friend in a thoroughly scientific manner. In fact, Valdemar has remained under the care of two physicians, while a medical student is in charge of taking notes of the procedures during the course of the experiment. Because of the realistic approach displayed in this tale, Scott Peeples claims that Poe's tale actually turned into a hoax as many readers were convinced that the story divulged was actually true.¹³ The remarkable realistic tone that characterises the story – which becomes especially telling in the detailed account given of Valdemar's condition – underscores the fact that Poe may have borne in mind his own experience of attending to his wife in her illness, thus showing that Virginia's ill condition had a tremendous effect on him both personally and creatively.

In fact, it can be argued that Poe's relationship with his wife exerted a significant influence on the way he approached the last years of his life as well as the

¹² David Leverenz. "Spanking the Master: Mind-Body Crossings in Poe's Sensationalism." (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 122.

¹³ Scott Peeples. *Edgar Allan Poe Revisited*. (New York: Twayne, 1998): 154.

way he perceived his own process of aging. Actually, the age difference separating Poe from his wife was considered a matter for concern at the time, since, even though Virginia's childlike appearance contributed to granting Poe virtual youth, having to face prejudices about age difference with his wife, Poe might have developed a sort of concern about growing older, as he was made to feel particularly aged in comparison with his wife. Likewise, Virginia's gradual deterioration and ultimate demise at an unusually young age became pivotal in underlining, even further, Poe's process of aging. Given the emotional symbiosis developed between Poe and Virginia, Poe grew concerned about his own health condition and his premature process of aging by means of living through his wife's illness. In fact, the symbiotic bond that seemed to characterise the relationship between Poe and Virginia – between mind and body, as if they were actually a single individual – is brought to the fore in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," as Valdemar's body lies inert while his volition is suspended and at the will of a mesmerising narrator. Likewise, Daniel Hoffman argues that Poe, in his tale, actually attempted to mesmerise himself so as to become both the narrator of the story – the mesmerising authority – and Valdemar – the mesmerised patient – with the aim of entering "that unknown existence of the spirit freed from the body."¹⁴ Poe thus sought to identify with the carer as well as with the patient in the story, thus blurring any facile dichotomy that could be established between the medical figure – the personification of the mind – and the patient – the representation of the body. Likewise, Hoffman further claims that, in his tale, Poe also aimed to explore the existence of the soul, since, to use Hoffman's derisive words, "if the body was held from decomposition for seven months by the passes of a Mesmerist, what then was speaking if not the soul?"¹⁵ Poe's tale thus reveals an allegorical meaning that tackles the body, the mind, and the soul as integrating parts of the human being, and thereby sheds light on Poe's views with regard to the afterlife.

¹⁴ Daniel Hoffman. *Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe*. (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1998): 162.

¹⁵ Daniel Hoffman. *Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe*. (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1998): 164.

An analysis of the intertextualities existing between Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story* and Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" – both of them fictions dealing with illness, medicine, and the pervasive presence of mesmerism as a metaphor – underscores the attitudes on behalf of the authors towards the last stages of their lives, the role of writing in the course of their respective disorders as well as those of their relatives, and their views towards transcendence. The schism between orthodox treatments on behalf of medical doctors and of alternative cures such as mesmeric practices in the fictions also underlines the psychosomatic quality that characterises the disorders affecting the patients in the fictions as well as those which the authors themselves suffered at this stage of their lives and the treatment they sought to try to soothe them. Furthermore, Bulwer-Lytton's novel and Poe's tale are also rooted in the discourses of illness, whereby the text is perceived as a medical history of a patient and the body of the patient transforms into a text to be read by the physician, while, as the fictions also reveal, the Victorian discourses of illness become deeply entrenched with the discourses of gender, especially through the figures of the male doctor and the female or emasculated patient. The practice of mesmerism also turns into a metaphor of the imaginative gift of the author, as the writer metaphorically mesmerises the readership, but given the fact that the authors not only play the symbolic role of the doctor with their diseased relatives, but also of the patient as a result of their own disorders, it will be argued that Bulwer-Lytton and Poe also resorted to the mesmerism of literature in order to try to escape their psychosomatic conditions. Likewise, inasmuch as mesmerism also underlines the dynamics established between the elements comprising the human being – the body, the mind, and the soul – Bulwer-Lytton's novel and Poe's tale turn into an allegory of the relations among these essentials in the afterlife, thus ultimately underpinning Bulwer-Lytton's religious beliefs as a personal reaction to Darwinism, and aware of the impossibility of escaping the body, Poe's desperate recourse to art to evade mortality.

Retirement from office, medical doctors, and psychosomatic disorders

When Bulwer-Lytton was in his early sixties, he became much concerned about an increasing deafness that menaced his capacity to fulfil his duties as a member of the House of Lords. In a letter addressed to his son Robert and his daughter-in-law Edith,¹⁶ dated 31st July 1866, Bulwer-Lytton showed his compliance upon having been recently raised to the peerage as Baron Lytton of Knebworth, stating that this accomplishment would surely have pleased his beloved late mother, in addition to also certainly pleasing his own son. Nevertheless, in spite of the overall jubilant tone that, for the most part, characterised his letter, owing to his inherent apprehension Bulwer-Lytton could not help referring to the particular occasion on which he realised that he was becoming increasingly deaf. In his words, Bulwer-Lytton declared that he had attended only one session in the House of Lords when he became deeply aware of his deafness. His realisation of becoming progressively hard of hearing also came hand-in-hand with a growing awareness of his limitations and his concern to find a cure for them. As evidence of his distress, it was shortly after the realisation of his condition that Bulwer-Lytton would travel to Paris to consult a distinguished audiologist, Doctor Turnbull, in an attempt to find a cure for what he perceived as unrelenting deafness. Ultimately, it seems that this physician's expertise had an immediate positive effect on his patient, as, in the course of the following year, Bulwer-Lytton's infirmity apparently began to recede.

Bulwer-Lytton's suspicion of a hearing disability at the time might not have been without ground. Some days prior to his death, in a letter to his friend Lady Sherborne, dated 12th January 1873, he admitted that he was hardly capable of writing a few lines as, in his own words, he was feeling "in great pain earache with violent noises in both ears."¹⁷ Accordingly, it might be due to the inception of his hearing disability – coinciding with the time when he was raised to the peerage – that Bulwer-Lytton's

¹⁶ Robert Lytton. *The Personal and Literary Letters of Robert, First Earl of Lytton, vol. I.* (London: Longmans Green: 1906): 211.

¹⁷ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Lady Sherborne." (12th January 1873. Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II.* London: Macmillan, 1913): 486.

political career began virtually to draw to a close, as in no case did he ever speak in the House of Lords, even though he had written several speeches to be delivered on different occasions. And yet, in spite of the evident seriousness of his condition as shown in the very last year of his life, back in 1866, Bulwer-Lytton's detachment from politics seemed to respond more to his growing disaffection with life in parliament, as well as the increasing distress he felt, mostly on account of his wife Rosina, rather than to the weakening condition of his impaired health. In fact, his rapid recovery in Paris scarcely a few months after detecting the first symptoms of his hearing impairment appeared to convince him that his condition in 1866 was no cause for great concern, at least, at the time. Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton's continuous references to his delicate condition and ill-health, after nearly a lifetime of incessant work both as a writer and as a politician, seemed to underscore physiological as well as psychosomatic causes, which, for Bulwer-Lytton, seemed inextricably intertwined.

In this respect, biographer Sibylla Jane Flower even goes so far as to claim that Bulwer-Lytton's health had seriously declined by the end of 1858,¹⁸ since, at the time, he contributed a written account of his medical symptoms on behalf of his doctor, which, in his own view, certified the clear decline of his health, and consequently, the resulting incapacity to hold office any longer. Given Bulwer-Lytton's intention of detaching himself from life in parliament, it was to that end that he unveiled his health condition to some of the most outstanding representatives of his political party, such as Lord Derby and Lord Disraeli. His letters to these two prominent politicians underpin Bulwer-Lytton's growing concern about his own health, which ultimately seemed to precipitate his final resolution to resign from the political arena. In a letter addressed to Lord Derby, dated 16th December 1858, Bulwer-Lytton expressed his intention to retire solely on the grounds of his deteriorating health. In this respect, in the biography that he wrote of his grandfather, Victor Lytton argued that "he [Bulwer-Lytton] explained that having been increasingly ill ever since the end of the session, his doctor had now

¹⁸ Sibylla Jane Flower. *Bulwer-Lytton: An Illustrated Life of the First Baron Lytton 1803-1873*. (Aylesbury, UK: Shire, 1973): 42.

definitely warned him that the consequences would be serious if he did not immediately take a complete rest.”¹⁹

Bulwer-Lytton thus seemingly resigned from office under medical prescription. However, as he unveiled in his letter to Lord Derby, he also decided to retire at that time with a view to allowing his political party some time to make arrangements so as to find him a successor. These personal circumstances befalling Bulwer-Lytton at the time bring to mind the opening scene of one of his last novels, *A Strange Story*, which he would publish scarcely four years after requesting his resignation from politics. At the outset of the narrative, a young medical doctor, Allen Fenwick, becomes indebted to his mentor, Julius Faber, an aging physician in poor health who decides to abandon his post in favour of his young disciple. Allen Fenwick meets his mentor, the eminent physician Julius Faber, in the course of a journey, when the latter falls seriously ill and Allen Fenwick, as a young but proficient physician, looks after him until his complete recovery. Soon after their casual acquaintance, Julius Faber sets off on a journey abroad, but in spite of the distance, both mentor and disciple remain in touch through regular correspondence, and it is through a letter that Julius Faber ultimately discloses his intentions to his young friend and disciple. As Allen Fenwick ponders:

Dr. Faber made me promise to correspond with him regularly, and it was not before long he disclosed by letter the plans he had formed in my favour. He said that he was growing old; his practice was beyond his strength; he needed a partner; he was not disposed to put up to sale the health of patients whom he had learned to regard as his children [...] In fine, he proposed that I should at once come to L— as his partner, with the view of succeeding to his entire practice at the end of two years, when it was his intention to retire.²⁰

In choosing him as his successor, Julius Faber allows Allen Fenwick to become initiated not only into his profession as a young physician, but also in unravelling secrets that would ultimately become of utmost importance at a more personal level. Through his individual process of learning and maturation, Fenwick is left on his own by his mentor,

¹⁹ Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by his grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Macmillan, 1913): 295.

²⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story.* (Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 12.

who only joins his disciple towards the end of his adventures to play an important role in the resolution of his conflicts.

It was on the point of turning sixty years of age that Bulwer-Lytton envisioned the aging character of Julius Faber, and in clear resemblance with him, who, in the opening scenes of *A Strange Story*, is just about to retire from his profession, Bulwer-Lytton himself had also resolved to resign from his political duties merely a few years prior to the publication of this novel. Nevertheless, in spite of his declining health and seemingly also against his will, Bulwer-Lytton was urged to hold office a few more years than he had expected for the sake of interests concerning his political party. Accordingly, as also happens with Julius Faber in the novel, who only retires once he finds in Allen Fenwick a just disciple, Bulwer-Lytton also felt the need to remain in politics until a successor was found to efficiently replace his position as parliamentarian. Julius Faber's wish to retire from life in the public eye and indulge in a more introspective phase of existence ultimately underscores Bulwer-Lytton's identification with this aging character. In fact, as a mentor bestowing his experience upon his young disciple, Julius Faber incarnates wisdom and experience, and as such, he plays a crucial role in giving shape to the philosophical discourse underlying the novel, which centres upon defending the tripartite structure of the human being, and ultimately, also aims at proving the existence of the soul from a religious perspective. Consequently, it is through Julius Faber's teachings that Allen Fenwick attains maturity both in his medical profession as well as in his personal life, undergoing a process of self-re-education that changes the eminently materialistic views that he holds at the beginning of the novel. Likewise, Julius Faber also accomplishes an important task in advising Allen Fenwick how to proceed to finally destroy Margrave and save Lilian. But above all, Faber remains a detached commentator who unravels the allegorical meanings underpinning the events taking place throughout the novel. It is in this sense that Julius Faber arises as Bulwer-Lytton's fictionalised counterpart, as he comments upon the philosophical perspective that the author favours and wishes to convey. Not entirely unlike Prospero, Julius Faber thus acts as an aging 'master of ceremonies,' who initiates Allen Fenwick into his profession, vanishes from the stage, and returns, by the

end of the novel, to help his disciple find the right path to follow and, metaphorically, to certify the turning-point whereby Allen Fenwick reaches maturity.

As evidence of Bulwer-Lytton's close attachment to the character of Julius Faber, shortly after the publication of the novel, in a letter he addressed to his son, dated 15th April 1862, he disclosed the important role that Julius Faber plays in *A Strange Story*. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton admits that Faber's reflections and conversations with Allen Fenwick are essential to the design of the novel. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton goes so far as to admit that Faber's dissertations give shape to "the main conception for which the characters are created,"²¹ ultimately claiming that Faber's reflections amount to the basis for which the characters of Fenwick, Margrave, and Lilian arise in the narrative, they being personifications of the mind, the body, and the soul, respectively. The fact that it is Julius Faber who speaks for the philosophical discourse of this novel of ideas asserts Bulwer-Lytton's identification with him. It is through this character that Bulwer-Lytton ultimately unveils the main argument underlying the philosophical discourse of the novel. In this respect, arising from his growing fondness of spiritual life and with reference to his character Julius Faber, Bulwer-Lytton admitted that he believed that "our special capacities to comprehend abstract ideas connected with immortality"²² are what ultimately prove the existence of the soul and the human belief in transcendence. In other words, at this stage of his life, through this novel of ideas, Bulwer-Lytton claimed that the human capacity to think about transcendence and comprehend abstract concepts already presupposes the prevalence of the soul as well as the existence of a reality beyond mere physical existence.

If Allen Fenwick feels professionally indebted to his mentor Julius Faber, a few years after his arrival in the village where he attends to his patients as a physician, Fenwick becomes involved in a tragic controversy with an aging and more experienced physician who answers to the name of Doctor Lloyd. Being a fervent advocate of

²¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to his son, Robert." (Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 348.

²² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to His Son, Robert." (Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 348.

materialism, Allen Fenwick feels inclined to argue against Doctor Lloyd's dubious methods once the latter declares himself to be an enthusiast of alternative curative practices such as mesmerism and clairvoyance. Through séances that are meant to display the effectiveness of his cures, Lloyd also seeks to defend the existence of the soul as an entity independent of the mind. Likewise, having borne the tragic loss of his wife in his personal life, as a physician, this touching experience urges him to explore the afterlife and the blurring boundaries separating mind, body, and soul. In an attempt to convince Allen Fenwick of the validity of his curative practices, Lloyd invites his young rival to attend one of his séances, and as a result of his experience as a witness, Fenwick writes a disdainful article expressing his contempt for Lloyd's practices and condemning them as utterly false. Lloyd's inability to defend himself from Fenwick's criticism ultimately involves his 'fall from grace' as a physician in the village, since he gradually loses adept, while his methods begin to be questioned and are ultimately discarded.

Owing to the public affront that he is compelled to face, Doctor Lloyd falls seriously ill, assuming that, when he dies, not only will his children be rendered orphans, but they will also become utterly penniless owing to his recent change of fortune. Accordingly, on his deathbed, Lloyd summons Allen Fenwick to his bedside to reprimand him for his behaviour and accuses him of being the real cause of his illness and pointing to his incapacity to cure him through the mere use of scientific methods. The scene in which Doctor Lloyd points his finger at Fenwick, blaming him for his approaching death, bears resemblance with scenes of mesmerism, hypnotism, or even, ventriloquism, taking into consideration the reverberating influence that Doctor Lloyd's words will exert on Fenwick, even after the death of the aging doctor. Metaphorical scenes of ventriloquism also recur in Poe's narratives, not only in the episodes of mesmerism in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," in which the mesmerist gives voice to dead Valdemar, but also in the scene of the corpse popping out of a box in "Thou Art the Man," in which, symbolically, the detective speaks on behalf of the dead body of Shuttleworthy, and the passage of the cat screaming from the tomb in "The Black Cat," in which the cat gives voice to the murdered wife of the narrator. These

passages bring to mind the fondness of Victorians for entertainments such as ventriloquism, puppetry performance, such as the ‘Punch and Judy’ shows, and puppet articles, like ‘Jack in the Box,’ which, even if primarily addressed to children, underscored a subtle feeling of the uncanny, which involved the fact of giving life to inert and ‘dead’ matter, thus being associated, at a metaphorical level, with death. Owing to the contemporary invention of telegraphy, which, metaphorically, involved transcending the physical body through the communication between minds, by means of the blending of science and magic, the advent of new scientific discoveries related to the use of electricity coexisted, hand in hand, with popular displays of magic in society, involving séances of spiritism, and performances of hypnotism, mesmerism, and telepathy, even on stage, which became deeply vivid in the cultural imagination of the nineteenth-century.

Shortly before his death and eager to inflict revenge, Lloyd predicts that Fenwick is bound to go through a spiritual conversion that will definitely change his mind with regard to his blind faith in the power of science and materialism. His words cause a deep impression on young Fenwick, as he feels guilty for the bitter end that awaits his opponent in the medical field. In order to appease his conscience, Fenwick reflects about these recent events, trying to justify his conduct through the following words:

It was some time before I could shake off the impression made on me by the words and the look of that dying man. It was not that my conscience upbraided me. What had I done? Denounced that which I held, in common with most men of sense in or out of my profession, to be one of those illusions by which quackery draws profit from the wonder of ignorance. Was I to blame if I refused to treat with the grave respect due to asserted discovery in legitimate science pretensions to powers akin to the fables of wizards?²³

Through these ponderings, Fenwick shows his guilt as he tries to expiate himself and his behaviour in the name of what he perceives to be the only ‘true’ science, as opposed to the dubious methods that his rival had persistently defended until the very end. Nonetheless, Fenwick’s insistence on exonerating himself necessarily betrays his guilt,

²³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 23.

as well as unveils his beliefs that Doctor Lloyd's views had also responded to some reason. The final conversation that Allen Fenwick held with his rival definitely proves a turning-point in his personal, as well as in his professional life, since it is from then onwards that Fenwick becomes entangled in the dilemma established between his total reliance on tangible reality and his increasing interest in that which goes beyond the reach of physical senses.

These two opposing threads of thought exemplified through Doctor Lloyd and Allen Fenwick bring to mind, respectively, a biographical episode in Bulwer-Lytton's life with regard to his determination to resign from politics. As a matter of fact, in addition to his letter addressed to Lord Derby, Bulwer-Lytton also wrote to Lord Disraeli so as to let him know that he was planning to abandon his political career on the grounds of his declining health. Nonetheless, Lord Disraeli's reaction to Bulwer-Lytton's intended retirement differed quite ostensibly from the understanding attitude that Lord Derby had instead adopted with regard to the same issue. Bulwer-Lytton's accurate and painstaking actions at the time testify to his concern about the image he projected before his political colleagues, and they also corroborate his will to demonstrate that his decision to leave the political arena was not without good reason. In fact, together with the letters that he addressed to both Lord Derby and Lord Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton also enclosed an account of his medical symptoms certified by Doctor Reed, the physician who had treated him for the course of twelve years. However, in spite of his efforts, Lord Disraeli rebuked Bulwer-Lytton's advances to abandon his political career stating that, in his view, the physical symptoms that Bulwer-Lytton referred to could not be taken as decisive to justify his retirement. Lord Disraeli held Bulwer-Lytton in high esteem as a politician, and consequently, resented the fact that his friend and colleague would be unable to continue giving due support to his political party. Consequently, in response to Bulwer-Lytton's letter, Lord Disraeli also asked him to reconsider his decision, especially as he was well aware of the fact that the justification of his retirement on the grounds of ill-health would hardly be believed by the general public at the time.

For the most part, Lord Disraeli met Bulwer-Lytton's account of his medical symptoms with notable scepticism. In particular, Lord Disraeli seemed especially concerned about the medical account that Doctor Reed had issued on behalf of his patient and which Bulwer-Lytton had enclosed together with the respective letters of resignation he had addressed to his colleagues. Lord Disraeli's sceptical views about the seriousness of his friend Bulwer-Lytton's condition seemed to lie in the fact that he himself had also experienced the same symptoms, but instead, he had refused to attach so much importance to them. In this respect, in a letter addressed to Bulwer-Lytton and dated 20th December 1858, Lord Disraeli's words reveal his general scepticism about both the medical profession and Bulwer-Lytton's health condition in the following way:

I have no opinion of doctor Reed, or of any doctors. In the course of my life I have received fifty letters from physicians like that which you enclosed to me, and which I return. Had I attended to them, I should not be here, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in robust health. Men of our temperament, at our time of life, ought not to require doctors. I am quite alarmed that you have been so long under doctor Reed, who, in some degree, explains your state.²⁴

Accordingly, Lord Disraeli tried to persuade his friend Bulwer-Lytton to ignore his physician's advice and instead resume his political responsibilities on the basis that Disraeli himself had also learned to disregard the opinion of many physicians who had repeatedly advised him to slow down the hectic pace of his political career.

Lord Disraeli knew Bulwer-Lytton well, and judging from his words, he may have well perceived his friend's turn for hypochondria and affectation, even if Bulwer-Lytton insisted on claiming that the symptoms that proved his ill-health had, in fact, a real basis. Nonetheless, as Victor Lytton argued in the biography of his grandfather, having been exposed to long sessions of strenuous literary toil for many years, it seems unlikely that Bulwer-Lytton should fall ill out of exhaustion owing to his political duties.²⁵ And yet, Bulwer-Lytton's personal suffering was obviously genuine, even if it

²⁴ Lord Benjamin Disraeli. "Letter from Benjamin Disraeli to Edward Bulwer-Lytton." (20th December 1858. Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 298.

²⁵ Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. (London: Macmillan, 1913): 300.

was not so deep-rooted in either his political or literary efforts, but rather in the misery arising from domestic trouble, which he had lately been exposed to and of which his friend Lord Disraeli could simply not be aware. Consequently, it seems right to assume that the medical symptoms that Doctor Reed had referred to on behalf of his patient had not so much a physical basis, but rather, they reflected Bulwer-Lytton's acute emotional turmoil at the time.

In mind and body: physicians and alternative treatments

In Poe's tale, even if it is the mesmerist who looks after Valdemar shortly before he dies, in the course of his illness Valdemar is taken care of by a series of different physicians that identify the symptoms their patient presents in order to make a final diagnosis. Like Valdemar, in his lifetime, Poe also became well-acquainted with different physicians that would offer their views on his problems with alcohol, in particular when they became an issue that attracted much concern given the social discourse of temperance that prevailed at the time. As a case in point, Poe became a close friend of Thomas Dunn English, a physician from Pennsylvania who had literary aspirations and who would eventually develop into a poet, novelist, and editor. Nonetheless, in spite of their close friendship, English would ultimately become one of Poe's fiercest nemeses during his lifetime. In fact, suspicion and hatred began to arise between them when Poe publicly mocked some of English's poems, while his friend took revenge by creating a character strongly based on Poe that began to populate many of his novels. The strenuous literary battle that took place between them ended up in court when Poe sued English for defamation and English would continue to damage Poe's reputation by giving an account of Poe's drinking habits and drug abuse.

In the same way, Poe also befriended physician and editor Joseph Evans Snodgrass, who became a renowned advocate of temperance. In fact, Snodgrass provided assistance when Poe was found unconscious in the streets of Baltimore a few days before he died even though, years later, Snodgrass would take advantage of Poe's case to preach against intemperance and would contribute to cementing the rumour that Poe was mentally deranged, even to the extent of declaring that Poe had been confined

in a mental institution for a few days. Actually, in the letters that he addressed to Snodgrass, Poe would often feel the need to justify his behaviour stating that he was not intemperate, but that he sometimes succumbed to what he would ironically refer to as “the spirit of Southern conviviality.”²⁶ In this sense, Poe’s letters addressed to doctor Snodgrass betray an understated sense of guilt, as Poe was concerned to prove that he was at all times sober except when he felt obliged to calm his nerves, thus ultimately declaring that his drinking mostly responded to medicinal purposes. To a certain extent, Poe considered Snodgrass a moral supervisor, stating that he was not only a physician but also a man “well read in morals,”²⁷ while Snodgrass would feel himself to be in a position to judge Poe’s dissolute habits and would remain, for the most part, sceptical about Poe’s attempts to justify his addiction from a strictly medicinal perspective.

Poe’s relationship with Joseph Evans Snodgrass would ever remain rather distant, but conversely, Poe became a close friend of a physician from Georgia, Thomas Holley Chivers, who, in addition to being a man of science, also had literary aspirations. For the last ten years of his life, Poe corresponded with Chivers regularly as the latter admitted his admiration for Poe and praised his “transcendent abilities”²⁸ as a writer. As a poet himself, Chivers intended to help Poe materialise his project of creating his own magazine, while, as a physician, Chivers also showed his concern about Poe’s alcoholism and even asked Poe to live with him and become his patient during the last years of his life. In contrast with Joseph Evans Snodgrass, who for the most part remained highly critical of Poe’s habits and sceptical about his condition, Thomas Holley Chivers identified Poe’s alcoholism as an illness rather than as evidence of Poe’s lack of moral strength.

²⁶ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Joseph Evans Snodgrass.” (1st April 1841. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: Gordian Press, 1966): 156.

²⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. “Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Joseph Evans Snodgrass.” (1st April 1841. John Ward Ostrom. Ed. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. I: 1824-1845*. New York: Gordian Press, 1966): 156.

²⁸ Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers. “Letter from Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers to Edgar Allan Poe.” (9th September 1845. See *Poe’s Letters* on the *Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4509090.htm>

Likewise, during the course of Virginia's protracted illness, Poe befriended a number of experts in the medical profession, but in particular, it was nurse Marie Louise Shew with whom Poe would keep up a close friendship until the final years of his life. Nonetheless, while Poe looked after Virginia and became her most devoted carer, his unrelenting vigilance and the overwhelming anxiety that ensued would ultimately have a deep effect on his health so that he would often find himself exchanging his role as carer for that of patient. In fact, as Poe took care of his wife, he would often fall ill as a result of his deep concern about his wife's health, thus causing Marie Louise Shew to draw her attention intermittently from her regular patient, Virginia, to her patient's husband, Poe, with whom she actually became very close. In fact, Marie Louise Shew was a highly-trained nurse, in addition to being the daughter of a medical doctor and the wife of a physician. Likewise, she was also well-acquainted with different members of the medical profession such as Doctor Valentine Mott, a physician from the New York University School of Medicine, who would examine Poe, given his fragile condition, months after Virginia's demise. Owing to her expertise in the medical profession, Marie Louise Shew even dared to make a diagnosis of Poe's health as a result of examining the symptoms he presented, especially years after Virginia's death, when it can be argued that Poe's health declined seriously. In the biography that John Ingram would write on Poe, he quoted Marie Louise Shew's memories upon having examined Poe as a patient:

I made a diagnosis, and went to the great Dr. Mott with it; I told him that at best, when Mr. Poe was well, his pulse beat only ten regular beats, after which it suspended, or intermitted (as doctors say). I decided that in his best health he had lesion of one side of the brain, and as he could not bear stimulants or tonics, without producing insanity, I did not feel much hope that he could be raised up from brain fever brought on by extreme suffering of body and mind – actual want and hunger, and cold having been borne by this heroic husband in order to supply food, medicine, and comforts to his dying wife.²⁹

²⁹ John Henry Ingram. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters, and Opinions*, 2 vols. (Danvers, Massachusetts: General Books, 2009): 217.

The detailed account of Poe's health above acquires particular relevance as it underlines that his condition presented physical as well as mental symptoms such as irregular heartbeats or a lesion in the brain together with sporadic periods of insanity given Poe's susceptibility to stimulants. In addition, Marie Louise Shew also mentioned that Poe suffered from brain fever as a result of, to use her own words, "extreme suffering of body and mind," thus hinting at the fact that his brain fever could be considered a psychosomatic symptom arising from both physical and psychological causes. Given the ambivalent origins of these symptoms, Marie Louise Shew granted Poe medical as well as emotional support on equal terms, since, even if, as a nurse, she took care of both Virginia and her husband in the course of their respective illnesses, she also became a close friend of the Poe family.

Consequently, according to Marie Louise Shew's testimony as a nurse, Poe's ill disposition responded not only to physical symptoms, but also to an inherently-acute sensibility, and it is this psychosomatic quality characterising Poe's condition, involving the mind as well as the body, which presents some resemblance with the detailed account of Valdemar's symptoms that is given in Poe's tale. At the onset of the story, different indicators confirm that Valdemar is going through the last stages of an acute phthisis, while he also presents an aneurism of the aorta. In this respect, the physicians give a minute account of the serious condition befalling their patient stating that,

[t]he left lung had been for eighteen months in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right, in its upper portion, was also partially, if not thoroughly, ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purulent tubercles, running into another.³⁰

As a matter of fact, it is significant to notice that, while the physicians exclusively focus on the patient's physical symptoms, it is the mesmerist – and narrator of the story – who lays emphasis on the fact that the patient's temperament is "markedly nervous,"³¹ thus

³⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1235.

³¹ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1234.

drawing attention to Valdemar's psychological profile. Likewise, even though during the course of his illness Valdemar has remained under the treatment of different physicians, it is at the very last stage of his serious condition that he resorts to a mesmerist to accompany him during the last moments of his life. In fact, Valdemar explicitly appoints the mesmerist to be the only individual allowed to remain with him during the moments prior to his demise. Hence, Valdemar chooses the skill of the mesmerist instead of the expertise of the physicians when the end appears to be close at hand. In fact, as the narrator observes, it is during those last days that Valdemar truly appears to sympathise with the mesmeric practice since the narrator states that Valdemar "had never before given me any tokens of sympathy with what I did."³² In this respect, it can be argued that, when there is no longer any medical cure effective enough to heal the body, Valdemar turns instead to other practices such as mesmerism not only to try to soothe the pain of his ill body, but also to search for another kind of support – of an emotional or even spiritual kind. In fact, the narrator notes that Valdemar has no relatives living in America and that he is to face his final moments in complete loneliness. Hence, it can be argued that, by surrendering himself entirely to mesmeric practice, Valdemar ultimately attempts to establish a close bond with one individual – the mesmerist – in the hope of taking part in a transcendental experience that will surpass his merely-physical existence up to then. As a result of Valdemar's agreement to be mesmerised on the point of death, he surrenders his will to the mesmerist, who metaphorically performs the role of a spiritual guide holding Valdemar's volition in his power. Hence, through the intercourse between mesmerist and mesmerised, Valdemar acquires a proxy immortality as his life is artificially prolonged beyond the point of death. However, his existence literally becomes a 'life-in-death' since, even if in his illness he seeks to transcend the body by subjecting his will to that of the mesmerist, Valdemar is, ironically, denied the right to give up his earthly existence even when he has already passed away. The resolution of the narrative suggests the ultimate impossibility of escaping the body – and, by extension, its vulnerability and finite

³² Edgar Allan Poe. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1234.

nature – no matter how hard Valdemar seeks to defy the physical effects of his illness. Likewise, Poe’s tale also implies that death seems to be a better option than that of being subjected to the literal ‘life-in-death’ that befalls Valdemar, and thereby merely prolonging his agony.

Hence, the effectiveness of mesmerism as a therapeutic treatment is ultimately put into question in the tale since, even if it is by means of the mesmeric trance that the painful physical symptoms derived from Valdemar’s illness appear to recede, his consciousness remains at the mercy of the mesmerist, and Valdemar is thus deprived of his will. Likewise, in spite of soothing Valdemar’s bodily pain, mesmerism proves ineffective to cure his body and merely postpones Valdemar’s inevitable demise, since Valdemar actually turns literally into a ‘living dead,’ powerless in body as well as dependent in mind. In fact, the literal ‘life-in-death’ that Valdemar experiences as a result of being treated through mesmerism bears a close resemblance with the metaphorical ‘life-in-death’ that Poe had to bear during the course of his wife’s illness. Actually, as is well-known, in addition to some treatment on behalf of physicians, Poe also resorted to other alternative treatments that he thought would help him overcome his mental anguish. In fact, according to biographer Kenneth Silverman, Poe began to drink seriously soon after Virginia’s illness in order to “allay the anxiety raised by the threat of her death,”³³ and as Silverman further estimates, some believe Poe simply drank too much, while others claim that, because of his sensitivity to alcohol, one single drop was enough to intoxicate him. However, regardless of his tolerance to drink, Poe was used to succumbing to alcohol in order to prevent nervous attacks and to “medicate his grief,”³⁴ which proves that he mostly envisioned drinking as a remedy to treat his anguish and distress. And yet, in spite of drinking to alleviate his pain, this remedy would often oblige Poe to lay prostrate in bed for the next couple of days.³⁵ In fact, ironically, as a result of this alternate treatment he would mostly succumb to, Poe would

³³ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992): 183.

³⁴ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992): 183.

³⁵ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992): 184.

have disabling bouts of ill health, which were taken as a euphemistic way to refer to the fact that he was under the effects of alcohol. Hence, for Poe drinking was his valve of escape from domestic trouble, but it was also his own particular 'imp of the perverse' that rendered him unable to control himself. In short, for Poe drinking became both his medicine and his poison at the same time.

In addition to drinking, Poe would also tragically experience the fatal effects of ingesting laudanum as he tried to escape from periods of intense emotional suffering. After Virginia's demise, Poe's anguishing existence did not come to a close, but, rather, it actually seems that his emotional dependence even increased as a result of Virginia's absence. In fact, during the very last years of his life, Poe became platonically involved with a series of women such as Sarah Helen Whitman, Sarah Elmira Royster, and especially, Nancy 'Annie' Richmond, as if he appeared to be in desperate need to fill a void that would allow him to start his life from anew. Nonetheless, as he realised that his hopes actually came to no feasible end, especially with regard to Annie – since she was a married woman – his frustration led him so far as to attempt to commit suicide using an overdose of laudanum. Even if Poe's act can be interpreted as his last chance to win Annie's affections, his attempted suicide is again indicative of Poe's ever self-destructive conduct. In fact, as happened with alcohol, Poe seemed unable to distinguish remedies from toxins, since, according to Kenneth Silverman, laudanum consisted of "a solution of powdered opium in alcohol, weaker in opium content than morphine or heroin,"³⁶ and it was easily obtained at the time as well as widely used as a tranquillizer, thus as medication, especially with patients that presented mental problems.

Poe miscalculated the dose of laudanum to take in his attempt to commit suicide, since he intended not to take the whole dose at first so that, in his purpose to impress Annie, he would have enough time to send her a letter – whereby he would inform her about the fact that he aimed to end his life – before the laudanum would actually start to have its effects. Nonetheless, Poe was not even able to post the letter, since, much earlier than he had expected, he was already feeling under the effects of the laudanum.

³⁶ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992): 373.

In fact, Poe intended to take the rest of the dose after sending the letter so as to make sure his purpose to commit suicide would be accomplished, but fortunately, by then he was already feeling too ill to finish what he had started. His deed, which took place scarcely one year prior to his actual death, revealed to Poe the blurred boundaries separating poison from medication, as from then on he would resort to drink as a medical remedy only to find out later that he would feel hopelessly ill.

When the body speaks: the body as text and the text as body

Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story* thus provides a literary transposition of the biographical events regarding its author's retirement from public life on account of his poor health. As shown above, when Bulwer-Lytton disclosed his intention of retiring from politics, Lord Derby and Lord Disraeli met his friend's resolution in significantly different ways. In the novel, Allen Fenwick also regards the retirement of aging doctors Faber and Lloyd in a distinctly different manner. In this respect, on the one hand, Fenwick feels totally indebted to his mentor Julius Faber and, upon his retirement, he gladly accepts to become his disciple. On the other hand, though, Fenwick remains sceptical about Doctor Lloyd's methods as well as about his infirmity, especially when Lloyd considers Fenwick partially responsible for his declining health. Hence, in the novel, Allen Fenwick exemplifies the opposing attitudes of acceptance and rejection, of belief and scepticism, which Lord Derby and Lord Disraeli respectively adopted with regard to Bulwer-Lytton's retirement. Likewise, in the novel, the roles of aging doctors, Faber and Lloyd, also illustrate those of Bulwer-Lytton, inasmuch as he bore Lord Derby's understanding response regarding his health condition, while he felt utterly disappointed with Lord Disraeli's displays of scepticism in that respect. The literary transposition of these events shows Bulwer-Lytton's concern to prove that his intended retirement was not without reason and that any sceptical response about the truthfulness of his medical condition at the time was simply out of the question. In this respect, in an attempt to warn about the need to disregard any sort of scepticism, in the novel Bulwer-Lytton makes Allen Fenwick undergo a re-education through Julius Faber's precepts that ultimately changes his mind in relation to his former sceptical views and his

consequent misjudgement of the late Doctor Lloyd. This re-education mostly consists in gaining awareness into a dimension of life that apparently lacks any scientific basis, thus leaving behind any sort of scepticism in order to attain a better and more thorough understanding of the human condition.

Given his scientific bent of mind as a doctor, Allen Fenwick's concern to attain true knowledge in his profession entails distinguishing actual facts from those which, apparently, can only respond to superstition. This is reflected in the highly scientific methods that Allen Fenwick displays in his profession, and conversely, in his deliberate reluctance to accept those practices that other professionals adopt, which, in his view, trespass the boundaries of what may be generally considered as thoroughly scientific in the medical profession. Nonetheless, these different medical practices also find their counterpart in the differing nature of illnesses that patients may present. In this respect, even if in most cases physical symptoms may be detected, their cause may not be solely rooted in bodily or physiological dysfunctions, but also in psychological or even emotional disturbance as is usually the case with somatic illnesses. This ultimately shows that the line separating physiology from psychology is not clearly cut, and therefore, medical practices that only focus on physical dysfunctions, that is, on what the eye can see, may not be effective enough to find cures for illnesses whose causes are not solely physiological.

This predicament that Allen Fenwick is made to face through the course of his spiritual re-education also bears resemblance to the ambivalent nature of Bulwer-Lytton's illnesses at the time. Actually, it may be argued that precisely because of the apparently somatic as well as physiological quality of his condition, some of his friends, as was the case with Lord Disraeli, remained strongly sceptical about the actual truthfulness of his affliction. In fact, critic Leslie Mitchell contends that, from time to time, Bulwer-Lytton's infirmity was genuine, even though it was also the product of his hypochondriac nature.³⁷ The physical symptoms that his condition presented, which, for the most part, did not correspond to a specific organic disease, seemed to reveal bodily

³⁷ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 91.

as well as somatic qualities. For years, Bulwer-Lytton had suffered from an incipient deafness that would worsen with time. Likewise, according to Leslie Mitchell, he was also subjected to chest pains and infections, and at moments, he realised that, whenever he had been writing, even if it had only been for a short lapse of time, he often endured inflammations of the hands which sometimes resulted in rashes.³⁸ Furthermore, he also admitted suffering from rheumatism and gastric irritation, chronic irritation of the mucous membrane, and a painful action of the heart. However, these physical symptoms were coupled with other indicators that revealed Bulwer-Lytton's tumultuous emotional state at the time, such as frequent instances of depression, sleeplessness, general exhaustion, and even fear of dying before he had accomplished both his personal and professional goals. The root of these symptoms mostly lay in different circumstances that Bulwer-Lytton had been forced to bear for years in terms of turbulent domestic trouble with his wife, the deaths of his beloved mother and daughter, and extenuating literary toil, which perpetuated until the very last days of his life. Moreover, his daily habits in his late years did not precisely contribute to improving his health either. As a matter of fact, in the biography of his grandfather, Victor Lytton recounts how Doctor Garret, who treated Bulwer-Lytton in his late years, described the exaggerated smoking habits of his patient, which turned him, to use Victor Lytton's words, into "an inveterate smoker."³⁹ According to his testimony, Bulwer-Lytton usually smoked from eight to ten ounces of tobacco in a week, usually at night.⁴⁰ Likewise, Victor Lytton claimed that these circumstances also showed in Bulwer-Lytton's appearance at the time since, in his late years, Bulwer-Lytton allowed his beard to grow in full, and he gradually seemed to pay less attention to the way he looked.

Taking into consideration these symptoms, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to exemplify a medical case which comprised both physical affliction and emotional suffering, thus revealing an underlying interaction between the two of them. In this

³⁸ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 91.

³⁹ Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. (London: Macmillan, 1913): 18.

⁴⁰ Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. (London: Macmillan, 1913): 19.

respect, critic Athena Vrettos has referred to this interrelation between the physical and the emotional in the context of somatic illnesses. In this sense, according to Vrettos, when individuals lack other forms of expressions, they may use their bodies to communicate intricate emotions, while the physical distress of the body may, in turn, contribute to unleashing the powers of imagination.⁴¹ Accordingly, given their somatic nature, illnesses ultimately become both a form as well as a substitute for language.⁴² Likewise, in the context of literary creation, if it is argued that the human body functions as a sort of narrative that reveals the emotional turmoil of the subject, the literary output of the unhealthy individual becomes a form of bodily substitution.⁴³ Hence, illnesses become indirect expressions of tumultuous emotions in a sort of 'emotional ventriloquism,' to use Athena Vrettos' words, while the expression of these troubled feelings in a narrative form functions as a therapeutic strategy aimed at reifying the symptoms of the patient. As a writer as well as a patient, Bulwer-Lytton exemplified many of these tenets, since the symptoms of his poor health ultimately reflected his emotional turmoil, while his writings also embodied his suffering and canalised his attempts at coping with his medical condition. In this respect, drawing on Athena Vrettos' tenets, his body could be taken as a narrative that unravelled his personal confusion, while his writings became acts of embodiment that revealed the physical symptoms of his personal commotion. This interaction between physicality and imagination was illustrated in the medical quality that characterised many of his writings at the time, as well as in the 'fictional' quality that prevailed in the medical records which described Bulwer-Lytton's condition, and particularly, that of his wife, Rosina. In this sense, his letters as well as his diary reflect Bulwer-Lytton's deep concern about his affliction and his need to canalise both his physical symptoms and his mental anguish, especially after the turbulent aftermath of his relationship with his wife.

⁴¹ Athena Vrettos. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 4.

⁴² Athena Vrettos. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 47.

⁴³ Athena Vrettos. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 18.

As a case in point, Bulwer-Lytton's letters to his good friend Lady Blessington through the course of his life are of particular significance in this respect, as by means of their correspondence, he shared his reflections about his personal troubles, while, in response, she advised him as a friend and helped him greatly to overcome his dejected condition. To Bulwer-Lytton, Lady Blessington became the counterpart of Marie Louise Shew to Poe, since, while the medical accounts issued by doctors focused on his physical symptoms, dissolute habits, and scientific cures, in her attempt to help her friend, Lady Blessington rather paid attention to Bulwer-Lytton's shattered nerves and the strain to which he had been subjected over a long period of time. In view of that, Lady Blessington offered Bulwer-Lytton remedies that seemed apparently aimed at alleviating his depressed spirits rather than at finding a cure for the physical symptoms related to his condition. Through her constant and honest advice, she appeared to adopt the role of a friendly nurse whose affable role significantly differed from that of customary doctors. Seemingly knowing exactly what Bulwer-Lytton was in need of at the time, Lady Blessington encouraged him to spend some time in Gore House, where he would be able to enjoy the peace and quiet he surely required from the moment his relationship with Rosina had become unbearable. Early on, in one of her letters, Lady Blessington addressed her friend Bulwer-Lytton advising him about his health in the following way:

I know you require air, and solitude, to recover from depression recent events have occasioned. Be assured I understand your feelings too well to allow you to be intruded on with me. You shall have a quiet room free from all interruption, breakfast alone, nay, dine alone, if you do not feel equal to our society, and the garden to yourself. You shall have your writing table and ingress and egress to the garden without meeting a soul. Only fancy yourself at an Inn, and not on a visit, and be assured a few days of quiet and fresh air will do more to recover your enfeebled health and depressed spirits than any other remedy.⁴⁴

As if she were playing the role of a nurse, Lady Blessington offered Bulwer-Lytton the chance to stay in her house where he would be in touch with nature, and would find the

⁴⁴ Lady Blessington. "Letter from Lady Blessington to Bulwer-Lytton." (16th June 1836. Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 6.

peacefulness and isolation that were needed to appease his depression and fatigue. Bulwer-Lytton's correspondence with Lady Blessington was prolonged for some time, and a kind of intimacy began to take shape between them to the extent that Bulwer-Lytton's letters acquired a confessional tone, as he disclosed his feelings and worries to his female friend. His introspection surely favoured his creativity in the literary field, but Bulwer-Lytton's personal turmoil also conditioned him to write a private journal, which he began to keep in 1838 and extended for a few months. In spite of the brevity of his private journal, it is a record of significant importance as it reveals Bulwer-Lytton's inner feelings, and his precarious health as a result of the circumstances. As an example of his introspective bent of mind, Bulwer-Lytton also disclosed his explicit feelings about growing older, which, in spite of his depressed condition, were found out to be particularly positive:

I think as we grow older, we grow more cheerful, externals please us more; and were it not for those dead passions which we call Memories, and which have ghosts no exorcism can lay, we might walk on soberly to the future, and dispense with excitement by the way. But for me, I cannot long be alone with the Past. I must ever be busied with little anxieties created for myself, in order to escape from the terrible stillness within.⁴⁵

For the most part, Bulwer-Lytton's introspective turn at the time allowed him to gain awareness into his personal situation and reflect upon his ongoing process of aging. As his words above unveil, even if he was somehow concerned about the burden of bad memories that aging might bring about, Bulwer-Lytton seemed to regard aging as a period when one could remain active, cheerful, and looking forward to what was still to come in life. Owing to the personal turmoil that he had recently suffered, this period of introspection and convalescence urged him to be more attentive to symptoms and remedies aimed at alleviating them. From that period onwards until his old age, Bulwer-Lytton thus became particularly interested in medicine and alternative treatments both as a patient as well as an amateur physician. In this respect, Leslie Mitchell even goes so

⁴⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "Letter from Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Lady Blessington." (3rd October 1837. Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by His Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol.II*. London: Macmillan, 1913): 9.

far as to argue that Bulwer-Lytton “became an expert on doctors, recommending some and gathering information on others,”⁴⁶ while he also grew increasingly attracted to treatments pertaining to the so-called pseudo-sciences such as mesmerism, galvanism, and even clairvoyance. In the course of time, his experience as a patient, the medical accounts of his own doctors, as well as his growing interest in different medical treatments endowed him with important knowledge with regard to the medical field. Likewise, it should be noticed that Bulwer-Lytton had also experience in attending to some of his diseased relatives, such as his daughter, his mother, and even if in an ostensibly different manner, his wife Rosina. His familiarity with medicine and health treatments, owing to his personal circumstances as well as his growing interest in the field, seemed to endow him with the capacity to make diagnoses about his own symptoms to the extent of prescribing himself suitable remedies, and even sometimes choosing unorthodox methods to the detriment of rigorously scientific cures issued by medical doctors.

Mesmerism, the poetics of writing, and ‘doctoring’ female patients

Poe’s tale “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” comprises the disciplines of medicine, the mesmeric practice, the act of writing, and the author’s personal conception of art. According to Gavin Budge, the medical theories of vitality are grounded on the existence of a vital principle, and often attribute the cause of a disease to the stimulation of this fluid either by excess or by defect.⁴⁷ Similarly, mesmerism also consists in the transmission of a magnetic fluid to others, and, in analogy with these theories of vitality, mesmeric practices are poised between the *physical* quality of the magnetic fluid found in individuals and the *psychosomatic* quality characterising this phenomenon by the effect of the imagination. In this respect, the important role that the imagination plays in mesmerism establishes a close connection between the mesmeric

⁴⁶ Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 91.

⁴⁷ Gavin Budge. “Mesmerism and Medicine in Bulwer-Lytton’s Novels of the Occult.” (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 50.

practice and the act of writing. In fact, as Budge further argues, both mesmerism and writing consist in the ability of the imagination to exert influence over others, and in this sense, the mesmeric quality can be interpreted as a synecdoche for the imaginative gift of the writer.⁴⁸ The mesmerised subject thus follows the instructions of the mesmeriser just like the reader constructs an imaginary world through the words of the writer. Nonetheless, an excess of imagination and an overstimulation of the brain on the part of the writer can also bring about the impossibility to stop thinking about an idea, which turns into a monomania that may find its release through the practice of mesmerism so that the writer – or, metaphorical mesmeriser – through the act of writing also becomes the subject of mesmeric practices.

In Poe's role as a mesmerised mesmeriser, as Richard Wilbur claims, Poe's stories are often personal and allegorical insofar as they turn into continuous variants of the same tale.⁴⁹ Through his stories, Poe mesmerises his reader, but overwhelmed by his own demons, he envisions his writing as a self-imposed process of mesmerism that he inflicts on himself with the aim of exorcising his obsessions, thus ultimately turning into his own physician and revealing the symptoms of his conception of art. As Wilbur further argues, Poe envisioned art as a stimulus to unearthly visions, seeking to disengage readers from reality and propel them toward the ideal.⁵⁰ In his poetics of art and his myth of cosmos, Poe conceived of God as a poet and the universe as a poetic creation, but owing to an undue exaltation of scientific reason above poetic intuition, the inhabitants of the planet fell out of grace and the poetic soul remained in conflict with the physical world. Hence, many of Poe's stories tackle the ultimate conflict between the poetic soul and the earthly 'self' in an allegorical way, as the general plot of his stories consists in the attempt of the poetic soul to escape all consciousness of the physical world. In this respect, his stories represent the conflict within the poet's own

⁴⁸ Gavin Budge. "Mesmerism and Medicine in Bulwer-Lytton's Novels of the Occult." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 47.

⁴⁹ Richard Wilbur. "The House of Poe." (Harold Bloom. Ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985): 53.

⁵⁰ Richard Wilbur. "The House of Poe." (Harold Bloom. Ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985): 52.

nature, as he aspires to attain ideal beauty through his imagination, but his mortal body inevitably chains him to the physical.⁵¹ In this context, as Michael Burdick contends, Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" explicitly tackles the human fear of decay, the terror of bodily transformation, and even the dread of the loss of physical identity after death.⁵² As the narrator in the tale depicts Valdemar's deteriorating physical condition, through his poetic persona Poe also places emphasis on the human disquiet arising from corporeal decay and the inevitability of death. Nonetheless, even if for the most part of the story, Valdemar remains under the effects of suspended animation and of a virtual demise, as the narrator of the story unveils, Valdemar's "general appearance was certainly not that of death."⁵³ Valdemar is thus enabled to hold on to life through the mesmeric gift of the narrator so that, even if temporarily, he manages to defeat the physical effects of death. The mesmeric trance through which the narrator holds Valdemar to life has therapeutic effects inasmuch as the narrator's mesmeric practices can be taken as a metaphor of his artistic gift as well as a metaphor of art within Poe's myth of cosmos. From his personal perspective, Poe as a writer plays the role of a mesmeriser, a wizard through words, but also identifies with the role of the mesmerised subject – that of Valdemar – who, in spite of managing to escape the effects of death, ultimately succumbs to them, thus turning Poe into a mesmerised mesmeriser.

Poe thus made use of mesmerism, which he devised as a metaphor for his poetic imagination, in order to explore and blur the limits separating life from death. According to Kenneth Silverman, in his writings Poe mostly concerned himself with death, giving rise to narratives that repeatedly address the fate of 'the self' in the afterlife.⁵⁴ In this respect, Poe conceived of art as a sort of mourning and as an attempt

⁵¹ Richard Wilbur. "The House of Poe." (Harold Bloom. Ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985): 54.

⁵² Michael Burdick. *Grim Phantasms: Fear in Poe's Short Fiction*. (New York and London: Garland, 1992): 107-8.

⁵³ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1238.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Silverman. "Introduction." (Kenneth Silverman. Ed. *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 17.

to defeat death through the cyclical depiction of a series of deaths in his writings. As Silverman further argues, Poe's writings, as is the case of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," present a succession of deaths with characters that die and still live, thus repeatedly overcoming death but unable to remain alive.⁵⁵ In these tales, narrators feel unable to gain actual insight into the concept of death and thus are incapable of mourning, behaving as if the beloved one was still alive and might return. Likewise, characters are dead with the quality of the living or are alive with the condition of the dead, thus being characterised through oxymoronic terms, as is the case with Valdemar. Poe thus faces the dilemma of exorcising his fear of death through his writings in which characters overcome death, whereas he also succumbs to its ever-haunting quality owing to the recurrent presence of death in his tales. In this respect, again, it could be argued that Poe attempts to take control of his fears through the power of words, only to find himself mesmerised by his own gift, precisely as a result of the destructive quality of his art.

Accordingly, for Poe art becomes an attempt to overcome death as well as a means to take revenge on life that becomes transposed in his writings as suggestive of the actual and cyclical deaths of many of the women in his life. By means of his creative gift, Poe tries to mesmerise his late-beloved women with the aim of keeping them alive through a symbolic and literary existence. As Kenneth Silverman contends, in an attempt to defeat the painful memories of the premature deaths of his biological mother Elizabeth and his foster mother Frances, as well as the imminent demise of his young wife Virginia, Poe gives rise to characters, who, like Valdemar, fail to remain dead and repeatedly hold on to life only to die again, thus disclosing Poe's desperate – even if erratic – wish to preserve the dead.⁵⁶ In a social context characterised by temporality and volatility, given the hectic pace of the times, through tales featuring characters that sway between life and death, Poe contributed to a prevailing cult of memory through a series of mementos – the transformation of his late-beloved women into ideas – that

⁵⁵ Kenneth Silverman. "Introduction." (Kenneth Silverman. Ed. *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 22.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Silverman. "Introduction." (Kenneth Silverman. Ed. *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 19.

were endowed with oxymoronic qualities. The habit of keeping locks of hair of a late spouse or daguerreotypes of late friends and relatives after their demise, although generally considered to be reminders of their deaths, also responded to a latent wish, even if figurative, to keep their own late-beloved ones alive. These mementos turned into tokens which amalgamated qualities that denoted presence and absence simultaneously, and became visual signs of grief and mourning as well as keepsakes, indicating the aim of their owners to retain their late relatives in the world of the living. In this sense, Poe's tales featuring patients on the point of death also present this same inherent oxymoronic quality that turns them into elegies insofar as they denote the author's permanent sense of mourning, but they can also be perceived as mementos which Poe resorted to with the aim of keeping the memories of his late relatives alive.

In the most frequently quoted passage of his essay of critical theory "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe makes use of his best-known oxymoron, which joins beauty and death, in order to describe what he considers the most poetical topic, thus saying:

I asked myself – "Of all melancholy topics what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?" Death – was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious – "When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world – and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."⁵⁷

In addition to unveiling the source of his poetic compositions, through his declaration, Poe was also disclosing a cyclical theme that became recurrent in his life, namely, the death of his beloved women, thus turning this tragic biographical event into an almost obsessive topic in his writings. Through tales that depict the loss of a patient, usually a woman, who dies only to come back to life, Poe plays the role of a doctor enacting an experiment of trial and error in an attempt to revive his patients through his creative gift.

⁵⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Philosophy of Composition." (N.P. Willis, J.R. Lowell, and R.W. Griswold. Eds. *The Works of Late Edgar Allan Poe with Notices of His Life and Genius in Two Volumes – Vol. II: Poems and Miscellanies*. New York: J.S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1850): 265.

Nonetheless, the topic of the death of a beautiful woman also becomes a clear source of personal therapy for the author, as its repeated enactment seems to respond to a clear purpose. According to David Leverenz, Poe infuses his tales with clear displays of sensation, often by means of the ludicrous death of characters, as a male defence against the excess of sentiment.⁵⁸ The symbiosis established between doctor and writer – and, by extension, patient and character – becomes so acute that the body of the patient-character feels totally at the mercy of the doctor-writer's mind, while the disembodied mind of the doctor-writer longs for sensation, by means of the actions of the patient-character, in an attempt to feel real. In this respect, in Poe's story "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," the narrator attempts to 'recompose' the body of his patient through the power of his mind in what appears to be, in David Leverenz's words, a "most radical literalisation of sentimental tropes."⁵⁹ By means of metaphorically 'recomposing' his patient, the narrator attempts to fight against sentimentalism and the danger of emasculation, the painful memories of the past and the overwhelming presence of death.

Likewise, Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," through the personification of the mind in the figure of the narrator and of the body in the character of Valdemar, also addresses Poe's theory about the interaction of art with life. Poe took care of different women in his life who fell ill and ultimately died, while he metaphorically resurrected them, transforming them into ideas in his writings. According to Athena Vettros, in the Victorian context, the diseased female body could be read in terms of the indirect expressions of emotional meaning that offered of its subject, while illnesses such as consumption or tuberculosis involved strategies of communication that renounced the spoken language in favour of the ailing body.⁶⁰ In this sense, in a metaphorical role as a doctor, Poe read the diseased body of these women, consuming them allegorically, and, through a process of exegesis, he turned

⁵⁸ David Leverenz. "Spanking the Master: Mind-Body Crossings in Poe's Sensationalism." (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 99.

⁵⁹ David Leverenz. "Spanking the Master: Mind-Body Crossings in Poe's Sensationalism." (J. Gerald Kennedy. Ed. *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 118.

⁶⁰ Athena Vettros. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 19.

them into the object of his writings. Conversely, through mimesis or a process of metaphorical contagion, the beloved women in Poe's life also emulated those of his tales who were actually based on genuine models. This transformation of the body into an idea – and, by extension, of life into art and *vice versa* – which is articulated in Poe's tales, becomes reified through Poe's experience next to his wife Virginia during the course of her consumptive illness.

Poe encouraged his young wife's taste for singing and for playing the piano to the extent that she became an accomplished musician,⁶¹ and through the course of his marriage, Poe turned Virginia into a fond lover of the arts, thus unleashing a symbolic process of idealisation of his wife as he transformed her into a muse. Significantly enough, though, it was precisely on one occasion when Virginia was singing for her husband that she began to present the first symptoms of her illness, thus showing that, in actual life, art must ultimately succumb to illness and death. As biographer Kenneth Silverman relates, Poe used to quiver with terror at any slightest cough of his wife, well aware of what it would eventually mean in relation to Virginia's condition, but Poe also chose to dismiss any reference to Virginia's illness owing to an inherent dread, as an author, of cruel reality impinging on art. In fact, Poe explicitly canalised the dilemma between life and art in his well-known tale "The Oval Portrait," whereby a painter transposes the life of his muse into a painting, ultimately draining out the life of the actual woman for the sake of an artistic idealisation on the canvas. In resemblance with Poe himself, the artist in the tale refuses to acknowledge the existence of death, as he fails to recognise the demise of his muse and takes her for the woman in the portrait; and yet, his art actually seems to depend on the death of this young woman as it is through her death that her portrait, by contrast, acquires its remarkable lifelike quality. The interaction between life and death through art that this tale addresses proved prophetic inasmuch as the only painting of Virginia Clemm that exists was painted precisely a few hours after her death.⁶² In this sense, reality emulated art and *vice versa*,

⁶¹ Kenneth Silverman. *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1991): 179.

⁶² Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989): 169.

as when death threatened to destroy her body, Virginia was ultimately immortalised and transformed into art, just like the young woman in Poe's tale is eventually turned into an idealisation of herself.

Poe's tales of mesmerism through the relationship established between mesmeriser and mesmerised – and, by analogy, between doctor and patient – bring to the fore Poe's experience in the care of different female relatives, thus blurring the roles of doctor, inasmuch as he took care of them, and of writer, insofar as he often turned them into the subject of his writings. In this respect, Poe's tales "Mesmeric Revelation" and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" inevitably show the author's actual concern about Virginia's serious condition. As a matter of fact, in "Mesmeric Revelation," the dying patient suffers from pulmonary consumption and is identified under the initial V, while the mesmeriser responds to the initial P, thus implicitly establishing a parallelism with the characters in the tale and Virginia and Poe. Similarly, in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," the patient, Valdemar, like Virginia, also suffers from phthisis and spends seven months in a living-dead state, just like Virginia repeatedly recovered only to fall seriously ill again. Poe's obsessive exploration of patients caught up in these transient states nourished on their recurrent presence in his personal life, as, in fact, it can be argued that Poe projected the figure of Virginia on other beloved women in his life, in the sense that her image reverberated and pervaded both his life and his fiction. As a case in point, during the period when Poe took Virginia and Maria Clemm to live in Richmond, he managed to renew his tie with his sister Rosalie as she lived in the same city. Rosalie and Virginia shared diverse qualities: they both played the piano; they looked younger than their age; and they had gentle but immature personalities. In this sense, they virtually became doubles of each other, and this bond became more noticeable in the absence of Virginia, as Rosalie would ultimately outlive her and Poe continued corresponding with his sister and visiting her frequently during the last years of his life in Richmond.⁶³ If Rosalie would often remind Poe of his late wife Virginia, it can also be argued that, in her illness,

⁶³ Dwight Thomas, and David K. Jackson. *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe 1809-1849*. (New York: G.K. Hall, 1987): xxxviii-xxxix.

Virginia herself also reminded Poe of another of his beloved women, as was his foster mother, Frances Allan. Poe's foster mother also died of tuberculosis and he would always blame himself for not having taken care of her, as Poe was already on very bad terms with his foster father, John Allan. Looking after his wife Virginia would expiate his guilt for his absence during Frances Allan's illness, just like taking care of Rosalie appeared to soothe Virginia's tragic and premature demise. The cyclical presence and absence of his beloved women in his life would be transposed in tales which enact transient states befalling patients, as they are looked after by their carers in the sickroom.

Playing the role of the male doctor: female illnesses and gender politics

Bulwer-Lytton's personal interest in medicine was ultimately transposed to his fiction in his novel *A Strange Story*, as the hero of the narrative, Allen Fenwick, joins the medical profession in the shadow of his mentor, Julius Faber, as well as in that of his contenders, Doctor Lloyd, and subsequently, Doctor Jones. The evidence that Bulwer-Lytton featured many of the characters in his novel as physicians ultimately shows his interest in the medical practice, as well as his knowledge about the medical profession at that stage in his life. According to Miriam Bailin, in the context of the Victorian realist novel, a parallelism between the figures of the doctor and the author was often established regarding the noticeable similarities between the scientific analysis pertaining to the medical practice and the exploration of fundamental truths that used to characterise realistic writing.⁶⁴ Consequently, Allen Fenwick, as a doctor, is somehow reminiscent of Bulwer-Lytton himself, particularly inasmuch as Fenwick is the narrator of the novel, whilst Bulwer-Lytton, as a novelist, sought to embody his knowledge about medical treatments in the character of Doctor Fenwick.

Bulwer-Lytton grew interested in medicine owing to his own experience as a patient under the care of different physicians, but he also drew some of his medical curiosity from his own testimony, having taken care of his own mother and daughter

⁶⁴ Miriam Bailin. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 13.

during the last days of their lives. In view of that, his convergence of roles from nursing some of his relatives to being nursed as a patient also transcends in the plot of his novel *A Strange Story* as Allen Fenwick attends to his patient, young Lilian Ashleigh, who, in turn, plays an important role in transforming not only Allen Fenwick's methods as a doctor but also in changing his exclusively scientific approach to life. In this sense, it could be claimed that, if Allen Fenwick ultimately succeeds in healing Lilian of her affliction, she, in turn, contributes to curing his professed scepticism as a scientist.

During the first years of his career, Allen Fenwick is requested to take young Lilian Ashleigh under his medical care, aware that her condition has managed to puzzle not only her relatives but also the skills of other reputed physicians. As a doctor, Allen Fenwick learns about his patient's family antecedents, her habits, her symptoms, and even some of the diagnoses that, up to then, have been hastily put forward on the basis of her apparent condition. According to her mother, Lilian's father died of brain fever as a result of over-study, and mostly owing to her father's intellectual disposition, Lilian has inherited an acute sensibility towards music, literature, and the contemplation of Nature. Given the emotional susceptibility that characterises her temperament, since childhood Lilian has acquired the habit of musing, often acting as if she were abstracted in a dream, and indulging in a visionary talk that often gives rise to her mother's deep concern. The fact of having been brought up in seclusion also seems to account for Lilian's unbound imagination and visionary nature. And yet, as Lilian comes of age, her condition appears to grow even worse as she begins to adopt a dejected attitude, gradually acquires a particularly pale complexion, and even becomes subjected to fainting fits.

On the basis of these symptoms, several diagnoses are made and Lilian is alleged to suffer from consumption, malaria, or even hysteria. However, given the strictly scientific approach that characterises Allen Fenwick's methods, he rather offers a more straightforward, and apparently, more rational explanation to account for Lilian's condition. In his view, Lilian's constitution rather responds to a nervous susceptibility that, at her age, renders her particularly impressionable and vulnerable to the influences of a secluded environment. Accordingly, Fenwick believes that Lilian's

symptoms of ill-health merely unveil an acute sensibility which often characterises those who possess a refined temperament and a superior character. In this respect, Fenwick gains insight into Lilian's contemplative nature, well aware that he feels increasingly attracted towards his patient, but, given his own eminently rational temper, he also feels the urge to restrain what he perceives to be an acutely visionary bent of mind, which apparently seems unbecoming to a dutiful young lady. In this sense, as Lilian comes-of-age and begins to take part in social gatherings, Fenwick notices evident displays of her vast and gifted imagination:

Her attention became earnest and absorbed; and sometimes a rich eloquence, such as I have never before nor since heard from lips so young, would startle me first into a wondering silence, and soon into a disapproving alarm: for the thoughts she then uttered seemed to me too fantastic, too visionary, too much akin to the vagaries of a wild though beautiful imagination. And then I would seek to check, to sober, to distract fancies with which my reason had no sympathy, and the indulgence of which I regarded as injurious to the normal functions of the brain.⁶⁵

Allen Fenwick's eminently rational approach as a scientist stands in sharp contrast with the obvious fondness for reveries that instead seems to characterise his patient's temperament. This initial dichotomy appears to be based on the traditional gender division established between the masculine quality of reason that Allen Fenwick personifies as a doctor and the feminine quality of imagination that Lilian Ashleigh embodies as his patient. Nonetheless, the close bond that will eventually join both characters in the novel leads them to modulate their initially single proclivity toward reason and imagination respectively. Drawing on the discourse of gender, Lilian's puzzling illness seems inextricably related to the apparent incongruity existing between her musing tendencies and her imminent awakening into femininity, given the fact that she is coming-of-age. Her visionary nature is alleged to be at odds with a traditionally-established model of femininity, and as such, her unbounded imagination is rebuked and ultimately pathologised. In this respect, Allen Fenwick, as her physician – and significantly, also as her prospective husband – begins to nourish some contradictory

⁶⁵ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 69.

feelings towards his patient and future wife. As Fenwick attends to Lilian and gets to know her, he feels the need to reprobate her visionary inclinations, and yet, at the same time, he cannot help feeling increasingly attracted towards his patient. Fenwick's ambiguous feelings for Lilian seem to respond to the prevailing discourse of illness at the time, which was deeply ingrained within that of gender.

In this sense, the figure of the female invalid was subjected to a double-edged interpretation. Illness in women served the purpose of justifying any sort of rebellious attitude or defiant behaviour that was considered totally inappropriate in young women, and thus, had to be discouraged and restrained. Conversely, the female invalid was also regarded as an embodiment of purity and refinement, who, given her anomalous condition, was granted access to spheres that were simply far beyond the reach of the rest, in tune with Harriet Martineau's defence of illness as a time for rest and reflection in her seminal essay *Life in the Sickroom: Essays by an Invalid* (1844). In the context of this prevailing discourse of invalidism, in *A Strange Story*, Lilian Ashleigh personifies this dual interpretation attached to female illness, which Bulwer-Lytton had also the opportunity of experiencing in his own personal life when he took responsibility for taking care of some of his diseased female relatives. As a case in point, the rebellious and even derisive attitude that Rosina would adopt towards her husband after their separation was taken as a symptom of her mental condition. However, Bulwer-Lytton's ultimate decision to confine his wife Rosina in a lunatic asylum caused a great controversy at the time as it appeared to be another case whereby a tormented husband intended to get rid of a troublesome spouse. Whether Rosina's condition was based on any real grounds or not, her symptoms were clearly pathologised and her ailment, either actual or contrived, was plainly condemned by her husband as his resolve to enclose his wife against her will ultimately prevailed.

Hence, Bulwer-Lytton's attitude towards the condition of his aging mother, and the illness afflicting his young daughter proved to be of an entirely different nature compared with his approach towards his wife's apparent condition. It is no wonder that Bulwer-Lytton felt profoundly touched when his beloved mother perished at the age of seventy, since, having remained deeply attached to her for most of his life, for Bulwer-

Lytton the death of his mother involved the loss of his lifetime companion, as well as that of his most beloved counsellor from his childhood to the advent of his late years. Scarcely five years later, Bulwer-Lytton would also have to face the tragic and premature demise of his young daughter Emily. In her illness, Emily became an embodiment of youth and innocence, and owing to the miserable circumstances that led her to contract typhus, being far away from home, it could be argued that she also became a victim of the animosity existing between her parents as well as that of estrangement owing to their cold and distant treatment. In both cases, Bulwer-Lytton remained by his mother and daughter in their sickroom during the very last days of their lives, having to endure particularly poignant moments, given his utmost affection for both of them. In addition, though, in these circumstances, Bulwer-Lytton might have also experienced some guilty feelings as the son of an ailing mother and as the father of a diseased daughter owing to periods of estrangement from them that he felt compelled to bear. It must be acknowledged that, following his ultimate decision to marry Rosina against his mother's will, Bulwer-Lytton's relationship with his mother, which had been close enough up to then, necessarily became more distant. Likewise, having spent most of her childhood abroad, in the course of Emily's illness his father realised that he hardly knew his own daughter, after so long a detachment from each other.

Bulwer-Lytton's presence in the sickroom of his mother and daughter in the course of their respective illnesses necessarily had an important effect on him. In these tragic moments, the sickroom became a site for contemplation and expiation as well as for remembrance and contrition. The importance he attached to the sickroom became particularly noticeable when, shortly after his mother's demise, Bulwer-Lytton declared that he intended to preserve her room in exactly the same way it was left prior to her death. In this respect, he expressed his wish to preserve his mother's memory, well aware of the inextricable connection that would always remain between his mother and the chamber that had turned into her sickroom during the very last days of her life. Likewise, given his profound affection for his female relatives and the tragic moments he had to endure by their side, Bulwer-Lytton gave good signs of his profound admiration for both his mother and his daughter in a way that exemplifies the prevailing

cult of invalidism. In Miriam Bailin's words, illness becomes associated with "desirable states of delicacy, sensibility and personal distinction"⁶⁶ in women, to the extent that illness appears to endow the female invalid with some sort of moral superiority. In this respect, it is claimed that the constraints imposed by ill-health bear resemblance with the regulation of personal conduct,⁶⁷ thus establishing an inherent connection between the female invalid and the morally-gifted individual. Likewise, the chamber in which the invalid lays prostrate – the sickroom – also seems to acquire a special aura within the discourse of female invalidism.

As a case in point, in *A Strange Story*, Allen Fenwick first meets his patient Lilian Ashleigh as she lies in the bed of her sickroom. As a physician, he is well aware of the transcendence given to the chamber where a sick person remains detached from the world outside. Given this context of intimacy and isolation, Fenwick knows that the fact of entering the chamber of a young patient involves some sort of profanation, as if the sickroom was a temple and the patient lying in it was a virgin to be worshipped. Fenwick describes this scene in the following way:

To the true physician there is an inexpressible sanctity in the sick chamber. At its threshold the more human passions quit their hold on his heart. Love there would be profanation; even the grief permitted to others he must put aside. [...] Reverently as in a temple, I stood in the virgin's chamber. When her mother placed her hand in mine, and I felt the throb of its pulse, I was aware of no quicker beat of my own heart. I looked with a steady eye on the face more beautiful from the flush that deepened the delicate hues of the young cheek, and the lustre that brightened the dark blue of the wandering eyes.⁶⁸

As a physician, Allen Fenwick gives good evidence of his reverence both for the sickroom and its occupant. Nonetheless, in spite of Allen Fenwick's conscientious scientific bent of mind as a doctor, as he cannot help feeling increasingly attracted to his young patient, Fenwick's respect as a doctor gradually gives way to the devoted feelings he starts nourishing for her as a woman. The dilemma that Fenwick begins to face upon

⁶⁶ Miriam Bailin. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 10.

⁶⁷ Miriam Bailin. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 13.

⁶⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 47.

meeting Lilian Ashleigh, which will ultimately involve an important turning-point in his life, reflects the ambivalent discourse that was associated with the sickroom and the cult of invalidism at the time. As Miriam Bailin further asserts, the sickroom was envisioned as the conflated embodiment of a series of apparent opposites. Illness brings attention to the vulnerability of the body, which suddenly demands whole attention, but the interruption of everyday routines also favours introspection and reflection, thus also giving more attention to the mind. Consequently, the patient becomes the incarnation of refined sensibility as well as the theorist of bodily affliction, thus blurring the established duality between body and mind, which are simultaneously negated and asserted. In the context of illness, there is also an ambiguous approach to ‘the self’ as both subject and object, since the patient often becomes the focus of attention – gathering people around the sickroom – but also turns into the object of scrutiny of others. In this respect, the patient bridges the gap between the individual and the collective, as the sickroom becomes a site of reclusion and privacy, but is also a place for reunion among other individuals. Accordingly, the sick person is perceived as both an individual, as well as a social phenomenon, ultimately subverting and reflecting cultural ideas about illness prevailing at the time.

Illness prevailed widely in the Victorian literary imagination and it was often used as a literary resource symbolising a turning-point in the development of the narrative. In this respect, Miriam Bailin claims that the Victorian heroine usually collapses into illness or bodily crisis as a sign of the loss of self-definition,⁶⁹ which ultimately underlines her transformation in narratives that depict her coming-of-age. Likewise, as Bailin further contends, the enclosure in the Victorian sickroom symbolises a rite of passage that the heroine must endure for the sake of her moral and social recuperation.⁷⁰ Moreover, the heroine’s scenes of illness were often subjected to an ambivalent interpretation. Illness concealed the heroine’s conduct that threatened to destabilise the socially-established moral roles for women, but it also gave way to the

⁶⁹ Miriam Bailin. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 15.

⁷⁰ Miriam Bailin. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 5.

heroine's process of physical and moral recovery. As a case in point, in Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story*, Lilian significantly falls ill when, in spite of her coming-of-age, she exhibits an unusual tendency for musing, which seems to render her conduct inappropriate, inasmuch as the coming-of-age of a woman involved acquiring a pose that was in accordance with the prevailing precepts of gender. However, strange as it may appear, in her illness Lilian also finds a source of empowerment. Even if she is under the medical treatment of Allen Fenwick, she begins to exert an undeniable influence on him to the extent that, owing to his attending to her case, Fenwick begins to change his views as a scientist.

Unlike the rest of doctors who have examined Lilian's condition, Allen Fenwick's medical approach appears to be significantly more cautious, as he casts a suspicious glance on the diagnoses that others specialists have so far put forward. Fenwick's scepticism and reluctance to formulate a hasty diagnosis, and consequently, of prescribing a mistaken treatment for his patient, Lilian, seem to bring to the fore Bulwer-Lytton's inevitable sense of guilt given the role that he was to play in his wife's medical case, which had attracted considerable public attention scarcely three years prior to the publication of *A Strange Story*. In this respect, the ambivalent metaphorical interpretation of Lilian's condition in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, as a sign of moral recovery from a reactionary position, as well as a source of empowerment from a feminist perspective, underscores the significance Rosina's allegedly mental state and consequent treatment ultimately acquired. Likewise, in resemblance with Allen Fenwick, as a doctor who makes a diagnosis on the basis of his patient's symptoms, in the part that he was to play in his wife's case Bulwer-Lytton also manifested his authority as well as his vulnerability in relationship with his wife, who, even if symbolically, would also become his patient.

As Louisa Devey claims, it appears to be an acknowledged fact that Rosina Bulwer-Lytton's commitment to a lunatic asylum was orchestrated on behalf of her

husband.⁷¹ In fact, in 1858, soon after having been appointed Colonial Secretary in Lord Derby's government, Bulwer-Lytton had to address the electors of Hertford to secure their vote of approval so that he could accept his office. Knowing that her husband was due to address his voters in Hertford, Rosina decided to take advantage of this situation in order to expose him publicly. Well aware that Bulwer-Lytton took pride in the high respectability of his public persona, Rosina knew that a public affront would put in jeopardy Bulwer-Lytton's honour and would also definitely hurt his pride. Nonetheless, as a result of her machinations, scarcely four days later, she received a visit from a sixty-year-old practitioner, Doctor Hale Thomson, who, apparently, had been sent by Bulwer-Lytton in order to enquire about Rosina's mental condition. Rosina was subjected to a seven-hour interview, and even if at the end of the session she was declared well-balanced, it seems that Bulwer-Lytton was still determined to have his wife restrained on the grounds of an alleged mental illness. In fact, only ten days later, while Rosina was in London, she was informed that arrangements were underway for her removal to Inverness Lodge in Brentford so as to remain under the medical treatment of Doctor Gardiner Hill. Rosina was thus ultimately pronounced to be of unsound mind on the basis of an apparently authorized medical certificate. As a matter of fact, as Lord Cobbold admits in his essay to pay homage to Rosina, under the law at the time, all that was required was the signatures of two medical men to authorise a husband to have his wife committed to a mental institution.⁷² Ultimately, it was only as a result of the public outcry coming from different periodicals at the time that Rosina was eventually released from Inverness Lodge after twenty-four days of unwilling enclosure.

Rosina's case exemplifies how the perception of female illness was necessarily rooted in the discourse of gender at the time. In fact, Rosina was pronounced of an unsound mind owing to her fondness for deprecating her husband in her writings, her

⁷¹ Louisa Devey. *Life of Rosina, Lady Lytton with Numerous Extracts from Her MS. Autobiography and Other Original Documents*. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Company, Paternoster Square, 1887).

⁷² Lord Cobbold. "Rosina Bulwer-Lytton: Irish Beauty, Satirist, Tormented Victorian Wife, 1802-1882." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton*. Delaware: Delaware University Press, 2006): 155.

novels, and ultimately, in her memoir, *A Blighted Life: A True Story* (1880), which is based on her enclosure in a mental institution, and which was finally published years after Bulwer-Lytton's demise.⁷³ Rosina's memoir can thus be taken as either a feminist manifesto to defend the outrage she was compelled to bear or as a fervent testimony that ratifies her unbalanced emotional state. Rosina's deliberate actions to expose her husband were literally taken as symptoms of mental illness, and therefore, pathologised, given the fact that they were considered totally inappropriate when found in a respectable wife and mother. Actually, as Elaine Showalter argues, women who defied the discourse of Victorian femininity were ostracised because it was believed that, in cultivating their minds, not only did women put their capacity for reproduction at stake but also their sanity.⁷⁴ It is in this sense that the mental institution was perceived as a site of moral management where women's minds were controlled precisely by the restrictions of freedom imposed on their bodies. The inevitable interaction prevailing between mind and body, especially in somatic illnesses, is particularly illustrated through the illness befalling the character of Lilian in Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story*. As Lilian comes-of-age, her reveries, considered to be symptoms of her ill condition, are subdued through the healing of her body during her prostration in the sickroom, which ultimately culminates in what is intended to be her moral refinement. Likewise, the attention that is drawn to her case, and the growing attraction that Allen Fenwick begins to feel towards her, ultimately empower Lilian, who begins to exert a deep influence on the young physician. In this sense, there is an imbalance of power, since, as Allen feels increasingly more insecure as a scientist and begins to question his formerly held beliefs, Lilian gradually acquires more influence and dominance over her physician.

Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story* was published just two years after Rosina's commitment to a mental institution. Through the depiction of Lilian's puzzling illness and her consequent treatment – taken as a metaphor of required moral refinement – it can be argued that Rosina's case as a patient was ultimately fictionalised and brought to

⁷³ Rosina Bulwer-Lytton. *A Blighted Life: A True Story*. (Louisa Devey. Ed. London: Thoemmes, 1994).

⁷⁴ Elaine Showalter. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980*. (London: Virago, 1987).

the fore in *A Strange Story*, as Lilian's fondness for reveries is taken as a sign of pathology and is consequently put under treatment with the actual aim to refine her character. In this respect, Marie Mulvey-Roberts claims that Bulwer-Lytton's earlier novel *Lucretia* (1846) can be interpreted as Bulwer-Lytton's attempt at vilifying his wife through its female protagonist, who actually ends her days in a lunatic asylum as a result of her crimes.⁷⁵ Hence, published more than ten years prior to Rosina's commitment to a mental institution, *Lucretia* can be read as Bulwer-Lytton's prophetic fictionalisation of Rosina's alleged process of alienation and ultimate enclosure in a lunatic asylum. In fact, following Oscar Wilde's axiom that 'life imitates art far more than art imitates life,' it seems that Bulwer-Lytton rather sought to transpose *Lucretia*'s fictional end to real life years later with regard to his wife. However, it must also be claimed that *Lucretia*'s illness is never tackled all through the novel and her final enclosure in an asylum is merely perceived as the rightful retribution she receives for her depraved conduct. It is in this respect that, in comparison with his earlier novel *Lucretia*, Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story* can be interpreted as a fictionalised narrative of illness with a significantly more conciliatory note, in which Lilian's condition and Allen Fenwick's medical authority are portrayed, but also, in which, owing to Lilian's influence, Fenwick also changes his views and beliefs both as a doctor and as an individual. This conciliatory tone surely responds to Bulwer-Lytton's feelings in his aging years, which led him to further tackle his feelings of guilt with regard to his wife's illness and subsequent enclosure.

In the novel, after examining Lilian's medical case, which up to then has been under the care of Doctor Jones, Allen Fenwick reaches the conclusion that the treatment she has received is mistaken and has actually contributed to worsening her condition. Instead of strengthening her nature, the treatment has been aimed at depressing her character, and consequently, as a result of Lilian's nervous exhaustion, her symptoms have puzzled her physicians to the extent that she has been alleged to suffer from illnesses, such as tuberculosis, with which her condition has actually no connection. In

⁷⁵ Marie Mulvey-Roberts. "Writing for Revenge: The Battle of the Books of Edward and Rosina Bulwer-Lytton." (Allan Conrad Christensen. Ed. *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer-Lytton*. Delaware: Delaware University Press, 2006): 167.

fact, Allen Fenwick contends that Lilian no longer needs any medical care except that which keeps her free from depression. Fenwick's reasoning underscores the somatic nature of Lilian's condition and the important role that the interaction between body and mind plays in causing illness, or conversely, in improving one's health. Throughout the course of his life, Bulwer-Lytton showed good signs of complying with this epicurean ethics, exposing the inherent link existing between the mind and the body.

In fear of aging and the ethics of writing

During the summer prior to his death, Poe would give plenty of evidence of the intricacies of his emotional condition through the letters that he addressed to the person he would always feel closest to, his aunt and mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, whom he would often refer to as his mother. In the course of his journeys, Poe addressed frequent letters to her in which he adopted a significantly confessional tone, constantly referring to his bad health in spite of the hectic rhythm that characterised the last months of his life. As a case in point, in a letter addressed to Maria Clemm and dated 7th July 1849, Poe confessed "I have been so ill – have had the cholera, or spasms quite as bad, and can now hardly hold the pen,"⁷⁶ while on 14th July 1849, he wrote two letters to his aunt in which he respectively admitted that "I am too miserable to live,"⁷⁷ and "I am so ill while I write."⁷⁸ As his personal letters disclose at the time, Poe presented clear symptoms of feeling psychologically exhausted, and this mental weariness also found its reflection in his appearance, which increasingly acquired a prematurely aged quality, as his portraits taken at that time actually reveal. However, the dejected mood, hypochondriac condition, and emotional dependence that he displays in his last letters also give way to a contained joy at the prospects of establishing a new relationship, especially through his renewed engagement and future marriage to Sarah Elmira Royster. In fact, Poe's permanent changes of mood led him to express his will to die in

⁷⁶ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (7th July 1849. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. II: 1846-1849*. New York: The Gordian Press, 1966): 452.

⁷⁷ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (14th July 1849. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. II: 1846-1849*. New York: The Gordian Press, 1966): 453.

⁷⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "Letter from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Clemm." (14th July 1849. *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. II: 1846-1849*. New York: The Gordian Press, 1966): 454.

one letter only to mention in the next his intentions to get married and his hopes to start a new life.

These continuous changes were also brought to the fore through Poe's daguerreotypes that date back from this last stage, as, significantly enough, during the last two years of the author's life, Poe grew extremely fond of having his daguerreotype taken. In relation to the process whereby daguerreotypes were produced, Michael Deas claims that these were, in fact, reversed or mirror images which had to be duplicated in order to produce a genuine picture of the individual, thus ultimately consisting in virtual samples of actual pictures.⁷⁹ This duality intrinsic within the process of producing daguerreotypes came hand-in-hand with Poe's virtual concatenation of a prematurely aged and a rejuvenated appearance. As Michael Deas argues, a chronological viewing of Poe's numerous daguerreotypes shows that "the final years of Poe's life were characterised by a rapid decline,"⁸⁰ which the author appeared to counteract through having his daguerreotype taken in an attempt to challenge the passage of time and its ultimate effects. However, his concern to preserve his image in a portrait also uncovered, to use Susan Sontag's words, his awareness that daguerreotypes involved a personal fear of being a *memento mori*.⁸¹ In analogy with Poe's use of mesmerism as a metaphor of his art, which sought to overcome death and attain some sort of immortality, with women that died and came back to life time after time, Poe also appeared to resort to the use of photography to challenge the effects of time and his increasing insight into aging, even if his frozen image in a series of daguerreotypes ultimately involved a reminder of the inevitability of death.

Similarly, in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," the narrator often describes Valdemar's condition as in a state of permanent change and of variable stability. In the course of Valdemar's illness, the narrator claims that he "had not seen him for ten days, and was appalled by the fearful alteration which the brief interval had

⁷⁹ Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989): 9.

⁸⁰ Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989): 6.

⁸¹ Susan Sontag. *On Photography*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973): 11.

wrought in him.”⁸² Conversely, though, when Valdemar is under the influence of the mesmeric trance, the narrator states that “all this time the sleep-walker remained *exactly* as I have last described him.”⁸³ It is thus implied that, through the mesmeric practice, Valdemar’s process of decay is brought to a halt, as he remains in a stagnant state that impedes his process of aging, and ultimately, even seeks to deny his death. In a metaphorical way, Valdemar’s ambivalent state in the story is certainly analogous with Poe’s inconsistent condition in the last years of his life, inasmuch as, in terms of his physical and emotional health, he appeared to undergo a process of decay and renewal intermittingly, which can be mostly perceived in his personal letters, and his curious taste for having his daguerreotype taken. As a case in point, the narrator in the story observes Valdemar and “the whiteness of his whiskers, in violent contrast to the blackness of his hair – the latter, in consequence, being very generally mistaken for a wig.”⁸⁴ This reference to Valdemar’s physical transformation is indicative of the fact that Valdemar is going through a transient state between adulthood and old age. However, the noticeable contrast between his black hair and white whiskers also suggests that it has not been a gradual, but rather, a sudden process of aging and it is likely that this has been the result of the illness befalling him. Hence, it can be argued that Valdemar has prematurely aged as a result of physical and mental suffering.

In addition to Valdemar’s changing appearance, the narrator also notices that Valdemar has a nervous temperament that turns him into a suitable subject for the mesmeric practice, and yet, Valdemar does not yield to the mesmeric influence as easily as the narrator had anticipated, thus suggesting that Valdemar’s illness has also effected some change in his temperament. The mesmerist also notices that, even if Valdemar has been mesmerised before, he never showed much sympathy for the mesmeric practice

⁸² Edgar Allan Poe. “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1235.

⁸³ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1241.

⁸⁴ Edgar Allan Poe. “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1234.

until the moment he felt utterly ill. Hence, the narrator observes some changes in Valdemar at a physical, psychological, and even emotional level that echo the ultimate transition that Valdemar is about to experience upon crossing the boundaries separating life from death. Valdemar's transient state is literally symbolised by the mesmeric practice, which actually turns into a metaphor of the transcendental transition that Valdemar is about to undergo. In fact, according to Anthony Enns, "mesmerism was clearly engaged in a radical reconfiguration of the divisions between mind and body,"⁸⁵ since, instead of approaching consciousness and the body in terms of the Cartesian mind-body split, "mesmerism introduced a new conception of materiality, which suggested that the body and consciousness were bound together and material."⁸⁶ The practice of mesmerism in the tale posits the case that consciousness cannot be separated from the body and, therefore, that the mind and the body are not separate entities, but are inextricably related to one another. In fact, in Poe's tale, it is when the mesmerist suspends his influence over Valdemar's consciousness and allows him to liberate his will that Valdemar's body also expires.

Given this entanglement between the body and the mind as tackled in Poe's tale, the close friendship that the author established with physician Thomas Chivers – through a series of letters that Doctor Chivers would address to Poe throughout the year 1844 – exerted an outstanding influence on Poe's writings about metaphysics and death. In his letters, Doctor Chivers elaborated a thorough metaphysical disquisition, giving his opinion about the transcendence and reflecting on the integrating components of the human being. Through his reflections, Doctor Chivers gave evidence that, in addition to being a man of science, he was also a religious man, having often reflected about the afterlife especially after the premature death of his female child. In this respect, in a letter dated 24th September 1844, Doctor Chivers argues:

Man is compound of two opposites – the one life, soul, mind – the other body, or death. He is, therefore, a living death. [...] The perfection of the physical and

⁸⁵ Anthony Enns. "Mesmerism and the Electric Age." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 64.

⁸⁶ Anthony Enns. "Mesmerism and the Electric Age." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 64.

intellectual nature consists in the educated richness of the soul in original thought. It prepares the soul for the enjoyment of immortal happiness.⁸⁷

Accordingly, Doctor Chivers acknowledges the dual nature of the human being, as it is integrated by the living components of the soul and the mind, while it also amalgamates a mortal component which is the body. In this respect, Doctor Chivers refers to the oxymoronic nature of the human being that is characterised as simultaneously dead and alive through the appellation of 'living dead.' Doctor Chivers' reflections present a remarkable intertextuality with some of the tales that Poe would publish at the time as is the case with "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844) and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), which explore metaphysics and transcendence, even though both stories present a significantly different tone. While in the earlier tale "Mesmeric Revelation" the mesmerised patient, Vankirk, dies peacefully, in the later tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," the mesmerised subject, Valdemar, goes through the agony of having his existence artificially prolonged through mesmeric practice. This change in tone might have been propitiated through Poe's response to one of Doctor Chivers' letters whereby the latter believed Poe to be a materialist, as, according to Doctor Chivers, Poe defended that the human being is the rudiment of a future material – and not spiritual – being. Conversely, Doctor Chivers himself contended that the human being is not only the rudiment of a future material but also of a spiritual being. Actually, in a letter addressed to Poe and dated 6th August 1844, Doctor Chivers methodically describes what may happen to the components of the human being upon death, thus arguing that,

[w]hen a man dies, we speak of his death in the usual, but not in the actual, way. There is a dissolution of the union of his soul and body, which union constitutes his person while in this life; but his personality is something very far above this. [...] The 'metamorphosis,' as you beautifully term it, is not a 'painful' one.

⁸⁷ Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers. "Letter from Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers to Edgar Allan Poe." (24th September 1844. See *Poe's Letters* on the *Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4409240.htm>

What appears to be pain is only the effort of organic life to carry on his accustomed functions.⁸⁸

Chivers' disquisition is remarkably evocative of the subject that is explored in Poe's metaphysical tales, especially, as Chivers focuses on the schism between the body and the soul that occurs at the point of death, which Poe also tackles upon describing how an individual is mesmerised shortly before dying. In Poe's metaphysical tales, the individual's will is suspended when still alive through mesmerism, and consequently, the body is unable to die, as body and soul remain together in life. However, when the will is ultimately liberated, the body is finally allowed to die and the union between the body and the soul is ultimately dissolved. Taking into consideration the similarities established between Chivers' thoughts as expressed in his letters and Poe's tales of transcendence, it can be argued that Poe might have taken Chivers' cue quite faithfully in order to give shape to the literary account of Valdemar's case, particularly as the tale reaches a middle ground between its scientific approach and its profound exploration of metaphysics, which also reflects Chivers' ambivalent nature as a scientist and as a religious man. Nonetheless, the outstanding change in tone that can be established between "Mesmeric Revelation" and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" – even if both stories present significant intertextualities in terms of plot, characters, and situation – also seems to respond to the fact that Poe, in response to Chivers' words, wished to reaffirm himself as eminently materialist, especially given the gruesome final scene of the tale in which Valdemar's body ultimately dissolves into dead matter.

Doctoring 'the self': ethics, medicine, and mesmerism

When he was in his early forties, Bulwer-Lytton already gave evidence of this epicurean ethics in his medical account entitled *Confessions of a Water-Patient*, first published in 1845 in the periodical *The New Monthly Magazine* as a result of Bulwer-Lytton's personal experience as a patient in the health spa of Malvern under Doctor Wilson's care. In his essay, Bulwer-Lytton claims that recent medical approaches are aimed at

⁸⁸ Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers. "Letter from Dr. Thomas Holley Chivers to Edgar Allan Poe." (6th August 1844. See *Poe's Letters on the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*). <www.eapoe.org/misc/letters/t4408060.htm>

restoring the whole individual to health instead of merely curing any diseased part of the body by the partial application of drugs. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton becomes a defender of the necessity to cure the whole constitution of the individual through adopting healthy habits and extolling the importance of the power of the will, of which Bulwer-Lytton always remained a faithful proponent. As a personal account of his illness and ultimate recovery, Bulwer-Lytton gives evidence of the symptoms characterising his ill condition at the time, which, for the most part, were the result of a life of constant toil, as well as of the grief following the deaths of his mother and daughter, and his troublesome relation with his wife. As Bulwer-Lytton proclaims, his sorrow had a negative effect on his health, and his emotional grief was ultimately transposed to his body:

I was thoroughly shattered. The least attempt at exercise exhausted me. The nerves gave away at the most ordinary excitement – a chronic irritation of that vast surface we call the mucous membrane, which had defied for years all medical skill, rendered me continually liable to acute attacks, which for their repetition, and the increased feebleness of my frame, might at any time be fatal. Though free from any organic disease of the heart, its action was morbidly restless and painful. My sleep was without refreshment. At morning I rose more weary than I laid down to rest.⁸⁹

Bulwer-Lytton's sickness at the time led him to become increasingly interested in books of medicine and medical treatments that might aid in alleviating his ailing condition. As a result of his studies, he reached the conclusion that individuals should take care of their bodies in the same manner they also took care of their minds, thus treating the body with the same habit and discipline that also contribute to rendering the mind strong and firm. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton grew particularly attracted towards Doctor Wilson's medical proposals, which consisted in different water cures aimed at both stimulating and soothing the body.

The core of Bulwer-Lytton's account, which is based on his experience during his stay in Malvern, lies in his realisation that this water treatment ultimately had a

⁸⁹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Confessions of a Water-Patient: In a Letter to W. Harrison Ainsworth, Editor of The New Monthly Magazine*. (London: H. Bailliere, 1847): 18.

significantly positive effect upon the nerves. Accordingly, through the application of water treatments upon the body frame, not only was the pain relieved, but it also resulted in the individual's general improvement, even with regard to mood and character. As Bulwer-Lytton further admits, his habitual stays in Malvern acquired a special significance, since the effects arising from such treatment transcended the body and influenced the individual in a more thorough way, both mentally and even spiritually. In fact, in the account of his experience in Malvern, Bulwer-Lytton admits that he had expected the water cure would consist in a particularly harsh and displeasing treatment. Nonetheless, he learned to associate the treatment with pleasurable feelings and thought that the need to adopt regular daily habits, as also promoted during the course of the therapy, was particularly beneficial. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton's habit of going to Malvern during the winter season to subject himself to this apparently harsh medical treatment ultimately acquired an ulterior and transcendental meaning. Taking into consideration that his essay adopts a confessional tone, and given the fact that the physical cure that he received also granted him mental and spiritual benefits, Bulwer-Lytton's stay in Malvern seemed to acquire a transcendental meaning as it could ultimately be interpreted as an act of contrition and expiation. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to seek not only the care of the body, but also that of his conscience. At the time he initiated this medical treatment, he had already undergone the separation from his wife Rosina as well as the painful loss of his mother and of his daughter. The tempestuous relationship with Rosina that was to follow the end of their marriage in addition to his sense of guilt for having hurt his mother's feelings after getting married without her consent, and the premature death of his daughter seemed a burden too heavy to bear. Accordingly, through the physical treatment of his body, it seems that Bulwer-Lytton was also deliberately seeking some mental and emotional rest. Actually, throughout his essay, he recommends water cures for physical conditions such as rheumatism, gout, and dyspepsia, but significantly, he also finds these cures effective for cases of nervous exhaustion and hypochondria. The medical treatment to which he submitted underscored the interaction between the body and the mind, as, involving the cure of the body, it also had a definite effect on the mind of the patient. Nonetheless,

Bulwer-Lytton even went so far as to endow this experience with some transcendental significance. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton considered the water cure so effective a treatment that it was not only aimed at curing a complaint, but in his view, it also achieved the purpose of prolonging life.

Accordingly, in terms of aging, Bulwer-Lytton even claimed in his essay that, as a result of his experience in Malvern, “the season of middle age, may, without exaggeration, find in the latter period of life (so far as freedom from suffering, and the calm enjoyment of physical being are concerned) a second – a younger youth.”⁹⁰ Judging from his words, he endowed the water cure with a rejuvenating and reinvigorating quality, not entirely unlike the power of the vril and the elixir of life that he would later fictionalise in some of his metaphysical works. In fact, in Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *A Strange Story*, the evil character of Margrave, who exerts a malevolent influence on Lilian Ashleigh, takes advantage of Lilian’s spiritual quality in order to find the elixir that will grant him eternal life. However, Margrave is ultimately severely punished as his idea of immortality is merely based on the immortal life of the body instead of the immortal life of the soul, which Bulwer-Lytton’s novel ultimately seeks to defend. In *A Strange Story*, the immortality of the soul is ultimately brought to the fore by means of the exploration of transient states between illness and health as well as the interaction between the tripartite quality of the human being – the mind, the body, and the soul – as personified by the three main characters of the novel, Allen Fenwick, Margrave, and Lilian Ashleigh. Nonetheless, in spite of the author’s interest in illness and healing as reflected and fictionalised in *A Strange Story*, which he wrote in his late years, Bulwer-Lytton had been concerned about health issues for a long time.

Bulwer-Lytton’s intensive devotion to work and the personal suffering he had had to bear at different moments of his life had a deep effect on his health, which was further aggravated by a peculiar turn for hypochondria. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton wrote an essay entitled “On Ill-Health, and Its Consolations,” which would be compiled into a collection under the title of *The Student*, published in the year 1835, and comprising

⁹⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Confessions of a Water-Patient: In a Letter to W. Harrison Ainsworth, Editor of The New Monthly Magazine*. (London: H. Bailliere, 1847): 33.

different essays that he had written years earlier. At the time, Bulwer-Lytton already appeared to have a profound interest in illness, and the effects that ill-health may ultimately have on the patient. Actually, it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton devised a sort of ‘ethics of illness’ as he chose to focus on the benefits that patients could gather from their ill condition. In this respect, already at the time, Bulwer-Lytton claimed that illness could also have its own benefits, since the patient usually becomes a more attentive, susceptible, and friendly individual. Likewise, the mind of the patient also becomes more focused, and accordingly, the books a sick person reads also appear to be more eloquent. In illness, the individual also lives less for the world, becomes less vain, and acquires a more visionary turn of mind. In this sense, Bulwer-Lytton endows illness with an important moral dimension. In fact, in his essay about illness, Bulwer-Lytton contends that,

the great counterbalancing gift which the infirmity of the body, if rightly moralised upon, hath the privilege to confer, is, that the mind, left free to contemplation, naturally prefers the high and the immortal to the sensual and the low.⁹¹

Consequently, Bulwer-Lytton reaches the conclusion that sickness favours moments of contemplation and reflection, arguing that,

our hours of sickness, and our necessary disengagement from the things of earth, tend to direct our thoughts to the stars, and impregnate us half unconsciously with the science of heaven.⁹²

Hence, in his essays of youth, it is significant to notice that some of them significantly focus on the stages of the departure of youth and the decline of life, since, early in life, Bulwer-Lytton had already shown his interest in the moral effects that illness had on the patient and the increasing attention towards spiritual life that it involved. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton’s essay about the moral implications of illness collected in his youth in *The Student* complements his thoughts about his process of aging that are expounded in

⁹¹ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “On Ill-Health, and Its Consolations.” (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 165.

⁹² Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “On Ill-Health, and Its Consolations.” (*The Student: A Series of Papers, vol. I.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836): 165.

Bulwer-Lytton's later collection of essays, *Caxtoniana: A Series of Essays on Life, Literature, and Manners*, published in the year 1863. In his essay, "On the increased attention to outward nature in the decline of life," included in the volume *Caxtoniana*, Bulwer-Lytton also endows the aging individual with a finer capacity for observation and attention toward nature. Accordingly, in the two essays – "On Ill-Health, and Its Consolations" – published in *The Student* – and "On the Increased Attention to Outward Nature in the Decline of Life" – included within *Caxtoniana* – written in youth and in his late years, respectively, Bulwer-Lytton perceived illness and the decline of life as an interval in which the individual pays closer attention to the immediate surrounding reality, and also as a confluence of naturally-induced events that causes the individual to feel increasingly attracted towards spirituality. Consequently, according to these principles, in illness, the body reclaims more attention, but the sick person also becomes more thoughtful and reflective, to the extent that Bulwer-Lytton's perception of illness appears to endow the sick person with a privileged access to moral and spiritual truths.

In fact, *A Strange Story* consists, for the most part, in Allen Fenwick's medical account of the illness and final recovery of his patient, Lilian Ashleigh, while she remains under his care. In the course of her sickness, not only does she attract the attention and concern of friends and relatives, but she also attains the capacity to exert some influence and authority on others, especially on her own physician, as he grows increasingly attracted towards his patient. In this respect, references to mesmerism, taken as a set of practices whereby one person can influence another through a variety of personal actions, become pervasive and play a significant role in Bulwer-Lytton's novel.

As A.N. Wilson argues, the practice of mesmerism was in tune with the Victorian spirit, as it suggested that there could be naturalistic explanations for phenomena that had previously been regarded as mysteries.⁹³ In the context of the 'ethics of illness' displayed in the novel, mesmerism is considered a therapy that consists of a series of influences exerted upon the individual at a physical, mental, or spiritual level. As Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne argue, Bulwer-Lytton believed

⁹³ A.N. Wilson. *The Victorians*. (London: Arrow, 2002): 106.

that mesmerism was in close relation with the philosophies of mid-nineteenth-century physiology, which connected mental activity and sensorial experience,⁹⁴ thus contending that imaginative sensitivity could be used to influence others and could also even contribute to causing physiological effects. In this sense, Bulwer-Lytton's use of mesmerism in his novel reflects some of the prevailing medical discourses such as the medical theories of 'the vital principle.' In fact, it was believed that a recurring harsh exertion of the mental faculties could exhaust the brain's nervous strength, produce fatigue, debilitate the body, and provoke hallucinations, thus ultimately causing the draining of what physician Alexander Crichton referred to as 'the vital principle.'⁹⁵ In the novel, the mesmeric influence that is established between different characters – mostly Fenwick, Lilian, and Margrave – becomes an apt metaphor to signify the transmission of 'the vital principle.'

Mesmeric practices pervade Bulwer-Lytton's novel through the sentimental relationship between Fenwick and Lilian, the role of the imagination, and the allegorical and religious interpretation that underlies the novel. According to Gavin Budge, the affinity existing between mesmeric practices and the discourses of sexuality – based on the fact that animate bodies permeate each other with an invisible fluid that is responsible for the attraction between them – appears to have led Bulwer-Lytton to use the relationship between Fenwick and Lilian as a plot device in order to bring mesmerism to the fore.⁹⁶ As a matter of fact, while Fenwick is engaged in the extenuating writing of his medical treatise, he has a vision of Lilian, with whom he has recently fallen in love. Fenwick's supernatural vision of his beloved can be interpreted as a case of mesmeric clairvoyance, which, in spite of his scepticism and his scientific turn of mind, he begins to experience soon after making Lilian's acquaintance. Similarly, since her childhood, Lilian has shown an acute propensity to have visions and

⁹⁴ Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. "Introduction." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 10.

⁹⁵ Alexander Crichton. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement*, 2 vols. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798).

⁹⁶ Gavin Budge. "Mesmerism and Medicine in Bulwer-Lytton's Novels of the Occult." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 42.

indulge in reveries, and, even if she is coerced into abandoning this habit as soon as she comes-of-age, she resumes her mesmeric inclination when she is under the wicked influence of Margrave. Significantly, Lilian has the vision of Fenwick as well as that of her late father warning her about the danger that is to befall them and urging his daughter to think of Fenwick as her prospective husband. Consequently, it is precisely when both lovers indulge in the mesmeric vision of their respective beloved that they realise they are meant to stay together.

Likewise, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel mesmerism is also used as a metaphor that underscores the functioning of the author's imagination. In this respect, as Gavin Budge claims, mesmerism consists in the ability of the imagination to exercise power over others,⁹⁷ just as literary genius also enables the author to exert influence over the reader through the course of his writings. In this context, and by means of his interest in the current threads of medical thought, Bulwer-Lytton knew about the connection established between mental activity and the circulation of the blood according to which intense mental strain, such as is involved in writing, may cause an increased flow of blood to the brain, which, in turn, may lead to an increase in the vividness of ideas, and hence, to a unique imaginative quality. However, the high sensitivity of the nervous impulses in the brain may also contribute to exhausting its strength as well as gradually draining the individual of its 'vital principle.' Therefore, as Gavin Budge further explains, the individual may ultimately experience failure of control over ideas or may even fall prey to hallucinations.⁹⁸ For this reason, quite significantly, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, it is precisely when Allen Fenwick is engaged in the writing of his treatise, and thus, caught in arduous mental exertion, that he has a mesmeric vision of Lilian. Through this scene Bulwer-Lytton thereby underlines how the physical is entrenched within the mental, and how, by means of the working of the imagination, the author can acquire qualities that may transform him into a seer, thus ultimately joining the mental

⁹⁷ Gavin Budge. "Mesmerism and Medicine in Bulwer-Lytton's Novels of the Occult." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 47.

⁹⁸ Gavin Budge. "Mesmerism and Medicine in Bulwer-Lytton's Novels of the Occult." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 45.

with the metaphysical. In fact, throughout his career as a writer, Bulwer-Lytton also experienced intense periods of acute mental strain that would ultimately have a deep impact on his health and would lead him to become further interested in the transcendent. In fact, Bulwer-Lytton believed that mesmerism was an apt soothing remedy to treat the condition of congestion of the brain as a result of strenuous mental activity.

Lastly, mesmeric references throughout the novel also uncover the important allegorical meaning that lies beneath the story. In this sense, drawing on the medical discourse underlying the narrative, Margrave, owing to his extraordinary bodily health, becomes an embodiment of 'the vital principle.' It is by means of his mesmeric influence that Margrave exerts an undeniable fascination on both Fenwick and Lilian, which consists in transmitting his vitality to them. However, Margrave is in need of the spiritual quality that Lilian personifies, and thus, he uses the mesmeric influence that he exerts on her to accomplish his purpose of attaining the immortal life of the body. Likewise, in spite of being a scientist and having an eminently materialist bent of mind, Allen Fenwick feels increasingly attracted towards Lilian, who, metaphorically, following this allegorical interpretation, becomes an embodiment of the soul. Fenwick's eventual attachment to Lilian saves him from the materialism that has brought him under Margrave's malevolent influence. The relationships established among the different characters of the novel – Fenwick, Lilian, and Margrave as personifications of the mind, the soul, and the body, respectively – brings to the fore the allegorical and religious interpretation that can be attached to the novel and that reaches its conclusion when Fenwick's mentor, Doctor Faber, indicates that only the marriage of Fenwick and Lilian will save them both. Drawing on the allegorical interpretation of the novel, the union of the mind and the soul, symbolised through the nuptials of Fenwick and Lilian, as well as the final destruction of Margrave, which, in turn, symbolises the finite nature of the body, brings to the fore Bulwer-Lytton's religious thesis about transcendence and the afterlife. As a result of their union, Lilian recovers from her illness and leaves behind her fondness for reveries, while Fenwick abandons his scepticism and becomes a believer.

Fictionalising death and attaining immortality through writing

Being a bleak account of life in the sickroom as well as an exploration of the boundaries separating life from death, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" can also be interpreted as Poe's personal allegory and fictionalisation of his last years of life. Focusing on both physical and psychological symptoms, the account of Valdemar's condition as a patient resembles the somatic quality characterising Poe's condition given that his physical symptoms echo a distressed temperament while his emotional suffering also has a deep effect on his health. Given this somatic quality, this ill condition is treated taking into consideration both the physical and psychological symptoms that the patient presents. In fact, through mesmerism, Valdemar receives a treatment that has a physical effect – insensibility to physical pain – but that is channelled through the control of the mind. Likewise, Poe equally required some medical treatment to soothe his physical symptoms, but he was also desperately in need of some peace of mind that would alleviate his anguished existence.

Since Poe's demise, critics have speculated about the real cause of his death and many hypotheses have been offered over the years in order to try to solve this puzzle. Poe's demise at forty years of age certainly appeared to be remarkably untimely, especially taking into consideration that he was engaged to be married again, and that he travelled around constantly, still clinging to his youthful ambition of establishing his own periodical. Nonetheless, Poe's eagerness to live fast in an attempt to regain his youth seemed to be counteracted by a premature process of aging. During the last years of Poe's life, different physicians made a series of diagnoses that were later taken on so as to shed light onto the causes of his death. As a case in point, in the year 1847, Doctor Valentine Mott agreed with nurse Marie Louise Shew that Poe had some lesions on the brain and that he suffered from brain fever.⁹⁹ Years after Poe's demise, Marie Louise Shew would also refer to an early incident that might have had an ultimate effect on his health, as, in a letter addressed to John Ingram, dated 16th May 1875, she declared

⁹⁹ Dwight Thomas, and David K. Jackson. *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe 1809-1849*. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987): 694.

having seen a scar on Poe's left shoulder while helping to change his clothes when he was ill.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, in the year 1848, Doctor John Francis diagnosed that Poe suffered from heart disease,¹⁰¹ while Doctor John Moran, who provided Poe with medical attention in the final days of his life, stated that his colleague Doctor John Monkur had claimed that Poe would die from "excessive nervous prostration and loss of nerve power, resulting from exposure, affecting the encephalon, a sensitive and delicate membrane of the brain."¹⁰² Many of these medical opinions underline the fact that Poe probably had a lesion in his brain that worsened with time, and yet, through the years, other hypotheses have claimed that Poe might have also suffered from tuberculosis, epilepsy, or even diabetes.

In addition to the different physical symptoms that might illuminate the real cause of his death, over the years much attention has also been drawn to the psychosomatic symptoms that have contributed to endowing Poe's life with an aura of mystery and that have greatly aided in giving shape to Poe's myth. As a case in point, the obituary that Rufus Wilmot Griswold wrote upon Poe's demise placed a remarkable emphasis on the author's difficult temperament, as well as on his peculiar psychological profile, stating that,

He was at all times a dreamer – dwelling in ideal realms – in heaven or hell – peopled with creatures and the accidents of his brain. He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayers, (never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was already damned).¹⁰³

Although it must be acknowledged that Poe and Griswold were never on really good terms, Griswold's words present an eloquent sketch of Poe's profile that draws attention to contrasting aspects of his character, as Poe's personality appeared to have dreamy, choleric, and melancholic traits that came to the surface intermittently.

¹⁰⁰ John Carl Miller. *Building Poe Biography*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1977): 139.

¹⁰¹ John Carl Miller. *Building Poe Biography*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1977): 99.

¹⁰² John Moran. *A Defense of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Washington: W.F. Boogher, 1885): 71.

¹⁰³ Rufus Wilmot Griswold. "Death of Edgar A. Poe." (*New York Daily Tribune*. 9th October 1849): 2, col. 4.

In tune with the connected dichotomy between the body and the mind, and as indicative of Poe's conception of art, according to Richard Wilbur, many of his tales endorse the allegorical struggle between the mundane and the visionary.¹⁰⁴ In tales depicting the care of diseased characters, as in the case of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," Poe's depiction of the sickroom in which the sick person lies becomes symbolic, inasmuch as it metaphorically constitutes the space for the enactment of the battle between the physical and the spiritual. As Wilbur further argues, chambers are often dark, circular, and free of angular regularity insofar as they symbolise a state of mind which is that of dream and unconsciousness.¹⁰⁵ Characters approaching the sickroom, such as physicians and carers, often go through winding passages that foresee the mind's gradual surrender to the unconscious. The image of the sick person enclosed in a chamber metaphorically involves the exclusion from the consciousness associated with the real world outside, which stands in contrast with the artistic spirit. Drawing on this analogy, when the body of the patient ultimately collapses and disintegrates, it is because it confirms its detachment from the physical and its ultimate transformation into spirit. As a poet, Poe shows that he feels removed from the physical aspects of the material world, and in his writings, he portrays the transformation of ill bodies into ideas, thus unveiling the allegorical basis of his art whereby he subjected the beloved women in his life, who fell ill and ultimately died, to a process of idealisation and of artistic immortality.

In his fiction, Poe made use of mesmerism to reconfigure the traditional dichotomy established between mind and body, since, as Anthony Enns claims, on the one hand, mesmerism involves the fantasy of communication between minds based on a desire to transcend the physical, but on the other hand, mesmerism also brings about a fantasy of corporeality insofar as previously immaterial elements acquire a physical existence.¹⁰⁶ Poe thus exposed his theory of art through tales that explicitly tackle

¹⁰⁴ Richard Wilbur. "The House of Poe." (Harold Bloom. Ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985): 56.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Wilbur. "The House of Poe." (Harold Bloom. Ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985): 65.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Enns. "Mesmerism and the Electric Age: From Poe to Edison." (Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 62. 64.

mesmeric practices and connect the material with the immaterial, ultimately contending that the mind and the body are inextricably bound together. Poe's theory of art is closely intertwined with his conception of transcendence, since, through his tales of mesmerism, Poe ultimately defended that, upon the advent of death, the soul survives and acquires the form of unparticled matter, which is invisible but nevertheless material, thus introducing a new concept of spiritual materiality.¹⁰⁷ Both tales, "Mesmeric Revelation" and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," revolve around this same theme and contribute to perpetuating this philosophy. In "Mesmeric Revelation," mesmerism allows Vankirk, the mesmerised subject, to occupy a liminal position between matter and spirit, which ultimately allows the patient to control physical pain and helps the mesmeriser to find out about the immortality of the soul. Likewise, through mesmerism, the narrator is capable of claiming that the soul is as material as the body but of intangible matter. Similarly, in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," the mesmerised subject, Valdemar, also sways between presence and absence, as his well-known declaration "*I am dead*"¹⁰⁸ – which Roland Barthes considered "an impossible uttering"¹⁰⁹ – ultimately suggests. Again, as happens in "Mesmeric Revelation," Valdemar is mesmerised at the moment of death to alleviate his pain, while the narrator and mesmeriser is allowed to explore what lies after death. Through the narrator, Poe thus rejects the Cartesian notion of body and mind as separate categories, and rather contends that they are closely connected as the soul, even if invisible, is ultimately considered as material as the body. Poe's thoughts on the afterlife are thus closely connected with his conception of art, which contemplates material bodies that die and are turned into ideas, only to become materialised again in his writings and to come back to life. In this respect, Poe conceived of his art as a therapeutic sort of mesmerism, which aimed to soothe the suffering of the material body and the pervasive presence of

¹⁰⁷ Anthony Enns. "Mesmerism and the Electric Age: From Poe to Edison." Martin Willis, and Catherine Wynne. Eds. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006): 65.

¹⁰⁸ Edgar Allan Poe. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." (Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe – vol. III: Tales and Sketches (1843-1849)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978): 1242.

¹⁰⁹ Roland Barthes. "Textual Analysis of a Tale by Edgar Poe." (*Poe Studies* 10. June 1977): 10.

death, but aspired to attain an alternate sort of immortality for the mesmerised subject, the women in his life, as well as for the mesmeriser, his own poetic persona.

Attracted towards transcendence and final arrangements

Bulwer-Lytton's novel thus underscores a significant religious vein that is often made explicit through the words of Fenwick's mentor, Doctor Faber, who can be regarded as Bulwer-Lytton's fictionalised counterpart and is also the character that vertebrates the ideological discourse in the novel. In this respect, with regard to religion and aging, Faber once exclaims to his friend and pupil Fenwick:

'What a lovely bridge between old age and childhood is religion! How intuitively the child begins with prayer and worship on entering life, and how intuitively on quitting life the old man turns back to prayer and worship, putting himself again side by side with the infant!'¹¹⁰

Faber's words seem to betray Bulwer-Lytton's notable interest in religious issues at the time. In fact, on different occasions Bulwer-Lytton had given evidence of his preoccupation with spirituality, as he read about astrology, the history of mysticism, and even secret societies such as the Rosicrucians, which he ultimately even seemed to have joined and become one of its most outstanding members. Hence, despite the fact that he was namely an Anglican, Bulwer-Lytton was reluctant to conform to any sort of conventional religion, and instead, adopted what appeared to be his own personal interpretation of faith. Through the course of his life, in terms of his religious convictions, he seemed to favour faith over reason. He focused on the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of religion, and being a writer, he also praised the close connection relating faith and imagination.

Nonetheless, Bulwer-Lytton's interest in religion became notably more acute during the last years of his life, as the letters he exchanged with his son Robert during this period widely corroborate. In Bulwer-Lytton's biography, Victor Lytton stated that the completion of his grandfather's novel *A Strange Story* led to an interesting

¹¹⁰ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *A Strange Story*. (Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Wildside Press, 2004): 248.

correspondence between Bulwer-Lytton and his son on the subject of religion.¹¹¹ These letters not only reveal that the relationship with Robert was at that time more affectionate than ever, but they also attest Bulwer-Lytton's outstanding concern about religion in his old age. Through these letters, Bulwer-Lytton shared his current thoughts and beliefs about his faith, mostly focusing on issues such as the existence of the divinity, the relation existing between spiritualism and scientific investigations, and most importantly, the connection between the artistic and the religious experience. In this sense, in one of his letters addressed to his son, dated 17th December 1861, Bulwer-Lytton claimed that, since only the human being has been endowed with the idea of God and the existence of a world beyond the senses, merely the human capacity to conceive the idea of transcendence could be taken as sufficient proof of its existence. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton also showed his interest in what he considered to be the dim boundary existing between mysticism and scientific enquiry. In this respect, he believed that the supernatural mostly consisted in science that had not yet been explored, while he also argued that unorthodox medical practices such as mesmerism, which was based on one individual influencing another through some sort of energy, was evidence that science also possessed an inherently mystical quality.

Nevertheless, Bulwer-Lytton's most interesting contribution in this context lies in connecting the artistic with the religious experience. In this sense, as Leslie Mitchell argues, Bulwer-Lytton drew attention to the importance of prayer, which he associated with the release of imaginative sensibilities, claiming that it is by means of prayer that the believer addresses God, in the same manner that the artist is also capable of contacting other realities through the use of the imagination.¹¹² In Bulwer-Lytton's view, the artist is a specially gifted individual with unusual powers of imagination that transcend the body and allow the individual to commune with a reality that is beyond the senses. It is in this respect that Bulwer-Lytton considered that the artist could not be compared with the rest of individuals and should remain apart from them, as the

¹¹¹ Victor Lytton. *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, by his Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, vol. II.* (London: Macmillan, 1913): 400.

¹¹² Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters.* (Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 139.

character of the artist closely resembles that of a visionary, or even that of a priest. For Bulwer-Lytton, art thus became a religious vocation which ultimately consisted in the exploration of the spirit, and which necessarily came to the fore in his fiction through examples of heroes that could be metaphorically described as being on a spiritual mission. As a case in point, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story*, Allen Fenwick goes on a journey of self-discovery whereby he finally rebukes materialism and believes in the existence of the soul, thus ultimately undergoing a personal and religious conversion that endows him with faith and spirituality.

As a believer, Bulwer-Lytton's interest in religion at the time also led him to ponder about his own death and also offer his views about the hereafter on different occasions. In fact, according to Leslie Mitchell, in 1859 Bulwer-Lytton published an article entitled "A Dream of the Dead" in *Blackwood's Magazine*, whereby he reported having dreamt that he had died. In his essay, Bulwer-Lytton claimed having felt a "sensation of inexpressible physical relief,"¹¹³ given the fact that, in the course of his dream and the vision that he was dead, he had managed to leave behind any sort of physical ailment. However, Bulwer-Lytton also envisioned the afterlife as a kind of pilgrimage whereby individuals should pass through different stages of progression until they reach perfection, which he equated with Heaven. Hence, in his letters, essays, and works of fiction at the time, Bulwer-Lytton considered all these issues in profusion, and as a result of his ponderings about death and the afterlife, it could be argued that he dutifully made any necessary arrangements before the final moment took place.

For the last three years of his life, Bulwer-Lytton's health considerably worsened to the extent that he felt obliged to spend most of his time being nursed in Torquay, where he would ultimately pass away in January 1873. In fact, one week prior to his demise Bulwer-Lytton was operated on with the aim of easing the increasing deafness that had befallen him in his late years. Nevertheless, precisely as a result of this surgical operation, an abscess took form in his ear that caused him to suffer acute pain, and in the final days of his illness, his condition became even worse, showing

¹¹³ Edward Bulwer-Lytton. "A Dream of the Dead." (*Blackwood's Magazine* 86. September 1859). In Leslie Mitchell. *Bulwer-Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*. (Hambledon and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 132.

symptoms of blindness and almost total deafness coupled with spasms and convulsions. Although the precise cause of his death still remains unknown, it has generally been acknowledged that the affliction of his ear probably spread to his vital organs, causing an inflammation of the brain that resulted in a coma, and finally, provoked his death. Bulwer-Lytton spent his last moments in the company of his son, Robert, and his daughter-in-law, Edith, who, together with his good friend Lady Sherborne, became dutiful and loving companions during the last days of his life.

As a sign of his efficiency but also of his concern about death and what was to follow in his absence, Bulwer-Lytton made some necessary personal and legal arrangements that would take effect shortly after his demise. In terms of legal matters, it seems Bulwer-Lytton wrote three wills during his lifetime, and in each of them, his son, Robert, became the most important beneficiary. However, as Leslie Mitchell notices, in Bulwer-Lytton's wills, there were other minor bequests left to what she considers to be Bulwer-Lytton's other family, including Laura Deacon, whose identity is carefully hidden under a pseudonym, and her three daughters, thus revealing that, after his separation from his wife Rosina, Bulwer-Lytton had formed another family. Likewise, probably as a result of a widespread concern about catalepsy at the time, a brief notice published in the newspaper *The Times* on 23rd January 1873, stated that Bulwer-Lytton's legal representatives also received a curious document, whereby Bulwer-Lytton urged them to preserve his body untouched for three days following his demise, and then allow physicians to ascertain that he was really dead. Moreover, in terms of arrangements for his own funeral, Bulwer-Lytton had explicitly stated his wish to be buried in his family home, Knebworth House, even though, given his magnitude as a man of letters, it was finally determined that he would be buried in Westminster Abbey, in the chapel of Saint Edmund, located near the Poets' Corner. It is remarkable to notice that at the funeral ceremony, which took place on 1st February 1873, Bulwer-Lytton's late-in-life friend, Professor Benjamin Jowett, with whom Bulwer-Lytton had shared deep reflections about spiritualism, gave a eulogy aimed at highlighting Bulwer-Lytton's great achievement in literature, but also at extolling Bulwer-Lytton's thoughts about the link between faith and the artistic ideal, which was clearly based on the last

conversations that he had held with his late friend. As a matter of fact, Bulwer-Lytton's meticulous, and in some cases, even peculiar arrangements for the aftermath of his death give sound evidence of his having carefully thought about it for a considerable period of time.

* * *

The significant prevalence that medical issues acquire in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story* and Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" underscores important issues with regard to health and the aging process of the authors at this stage of their lives. The presence of physicians and mesmerists alike in both fictions is indicative of the authors' increasing involvement with medical doctors, as their health declined and as they took care of their diseased relatives. These two writers also gained insight into the symbiotic relation between the body and the mind – which is widely explored in their fictions – thus unveiling the remarkable psychosomatic quality of their illnesses, as personified by the figures of the doctor and the mesmerist, who focus on the body and the mind, respectively, but whose action also exerts its influence over the mind and the body. Like Valdemar, who requests the help of a mesmeriser when medical doctors are no longer capable of improving his condition, Poe also resorted to the care of his aunt Maria Clemm and the friendship of nurse Marie Louise Shew, who offered him the emotional comfort he needed in his unhealthy condition, even though, owing to his erratic behaviour, Poe would also resort to alcoholism as a double-edged way to make himself feel better, but also as a means to deteriorate his health. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story*, his hero Allen Fenwick also adopts a different attitude towards the retirement of his colleagues, Julius Faber and Doctor Lloyd, aware of their different personalities and medical methods, even though Fenwick's eminently scientific bent of mind eventually transforms through his interaction with these two prototypes of the medical man. Similarly, when upon leaving his political career as a result of his declining health, Bulwer-Lytton met the sceptical response of Lord Disraeli, the author would eventually resort to unorthodox treatments that would help

him cure the body as well as the mind, thus revealing his awareness of the interaction between both, while also unveiling an unvoiced sense of hypochondria as well as of guilt on account of his relationship with his former wife.

Likewise, drawing on the discourses of illness and invalidism prevailing at the time, the body of the diseased, as personified by Lillian in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and Valdemar in Poe's tale, becomes a text, as it speaks of its medical symptoms, and their medical histories become reifications of the body of the patient. Stretching further this parallelism, fictions become medicalised – as is the case of Poe's tale and Bulwer-Lytton's novel – and medical accounts acquire a fictionalised quality, as exemplified by the much-questioned medical certificate whereby Bulwer-Lytton's wife, Rosina, was declared of unsound mind, thus also underpinning the analogy established between the role of the doctor and that of the writer. Precisely owing to the close connection between the discourse of invalidism and that of gender politics at the time, Lillian's illness in Bulwer-Lytton's novel also reflects the ambivalent interpretation of female illness on behalf of male doctors, insofar as her illness endows her with a privileged state of reflection, while her health disorder is also interpreted as a necessary process of moral chastisement as she progresses on her way to acquire femininity through her process of coming-of-age. In Poe's tale, the author metaphorically adopts the role of a mesmeriser who tries to revive his patient through his creative gift and, in so doing, he transforms his patient into an idea – through the prevalence of mind over body by means of the mesmeric trance – in an attempt to come to terms with the latent experience of having lost his wife, Virginia, in the course of her consumptive illness.

In addition, personal documents that the authors also wrote at the time, especially letters with a confessional tone, underline the decline of their health and how both writers approached their aging process using different strategies, as Bulwer-Lytton resorted to water treatment to cure the body and the mind and looked upon age with contained optimism, while Poe metaphorically attempted to bring his process of aging to a halt through having his daguerreotype continually taken during the last years of his life, and engaging in a series of romantic relationships that would ultimately come to no avail. In this respect, in Poe's tale, the sudden change that the narrator perceives in his

patient, Valdemar, is also symptomatic of the abrupt alteration that the author underwent, fluctuating from a rejuvenated to a rather aged appearance, and *vice versa*, as judging from the series of daguerreotypes that were taken of him in the last years of his life. As also happens to Valdemar in his tale, Poe expressed his own inability to escape the body, especially inasmuch as he conceived the soul to be material, as he displayed in his letters to his friend and physician, Thomas Chivers. The hectic rhythm that characterised Poe's life in the last months of his existence underscored a desperate need to live fast and an unvoiced fear of premature aging.

Finally, the pervasive presence of death, and even of the afterlife, in both fictions also underscores a series of deaths of their beloved ones that the authors had to bear, in particular, that of his mother and daughter in the case of Bulwer-Lytton, and that of his wife in the case of Poe. In this respect, both authors revealed an increasing interest in reflecting upon transcendence, as Poe would give shape to his poetics of writing bearing in mind the parallelism between the figures of the mesmeriser and the mesmerised subject. As a writer and as a metaphorical mesmeriser, Poe engages in a fictional world that is repeatedly retold and never comes to an end with the aim of attaining a sort of surrogate immortality, whereas, in his compulsive behaviour to rewrite a series of deaths into his tales, he feels trapped in his universe and becomes a mesmerised mesmeriser. In contrast, the allegorical meaning that underlies Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story* eventually exposes the author's religious faith in the advent of the Darwinian theories, as the main characters in his novel – Allen Fenwick, Lilian Ashleigh, and Margrave – as embodiments of the mind, the soul, and the body, respectively, dramatise the prevalence of the soul – as represented by the recovery of Lilian – to the detriment of the body – as certified by the death of Margrave. Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton would always envision his faith as necessarily connected with his artistic ideal, and showed, from a very young age, a remarkable and conscious insight into his own process of aging, which would eventually lead him to approach old age and his last days of life with the contentment of having achieved most of his goals in life.

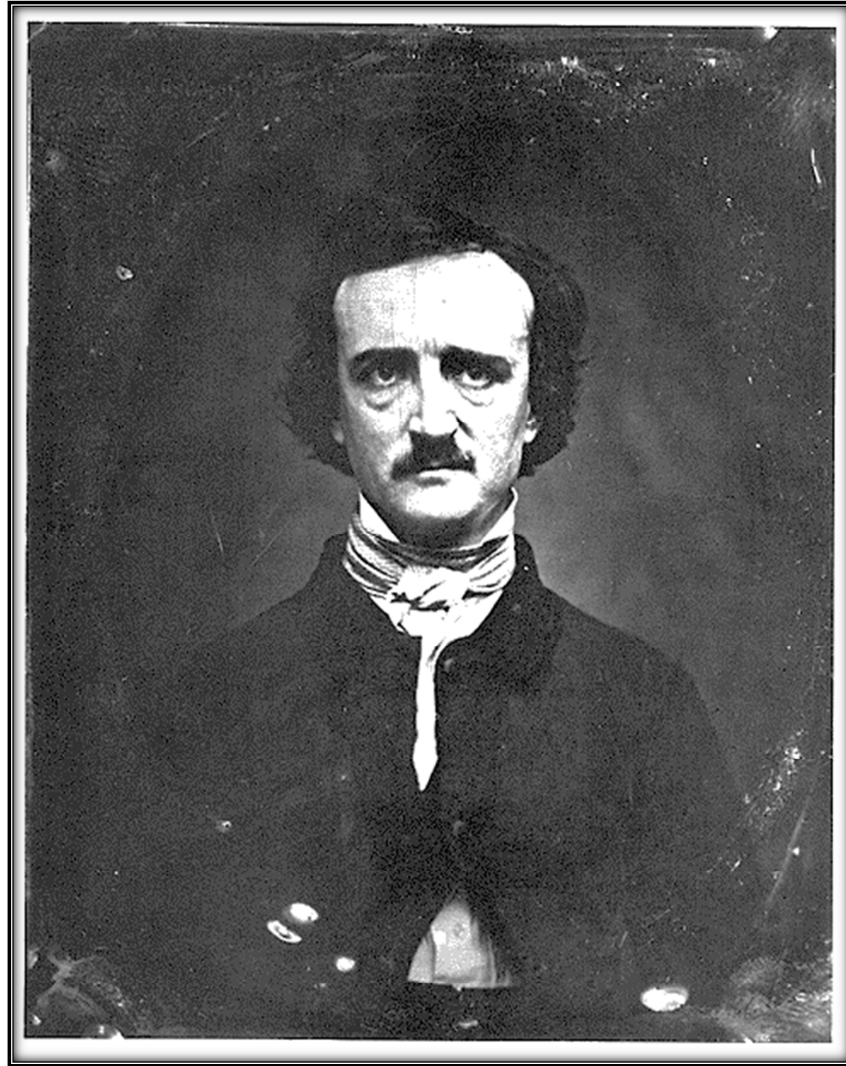


Figure 10 - Poe in the 'Ultima Thule' daguerreotype, in 1848.

Taken from: Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*.

(Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989): 37.

Conclusion

Being economically disinherited in his young adulthood, after growing accustomed to a reasonably wealthy standard of living during his childhood, Poe was urged to live fast, and in this respect, it could be argued that, in the last years of his life, he underwent a quickened process of aging. Conversely, Bulwer-Lytton lived a considerably longer life and was fairly conscious of aging, for the most part illustrating the dignity that the process of aging bestows upon the individual. Both authors experienced a series of symbolic transitions that conditioned their way of perceiving aging, which are also reflected in the literary works pertaining to different stages in their lives as a reflection of their respective situations. In terms of their biographies, being contemporaries, Poe and Bulwer-Lytton could be regarded as transatlantic double figures, as they personified two ends of the spectrum of aging, while their literary works present an important number of intertextualities and share manifold literary genres, such as medievalism, social satire, crime, historical fiction, gothicism, domesticity, and the metaphysical. Even if coming from different backgrounds – Bulwer-Lytton being an aristocrat and heir to the Lytton lineage, and Poe being an orphan adopted by the Allans – they found themselves undergoing similar symbolic transitions that particularly influenced the different ways they perceived the process of aging and the different modalities of aging they represented eventually, as reflective of their respective societies and their personal circumstances. Likewise, given the significant intertextualities identified in their lives and literary works, and their condition as transatlantic literary doubles, this comparative analysis has also served the purpose of evincing the important influence that Bulwer-Lytton exerted over the short fiction of Poe, and the premise that Bulwer-Lytton should be considered an eminent Victorian novelist as was the case during his lifetime.

Despite their differing initial situations, as they were almost representative of opposite social classes and different cultural mindsets, the fact that they both

experienced similar transitions that significantly changed their lives at a certain point in their lives paves the ground to gain insight into the different ways they ultimately approached aging, looking into the ways they adapted to the new situation and how successful they were in their endeavours. In the case of Poe, despite his humble origins, he was adopted by a wealthy merchant, John Allan, who provided him with the education he could never have received had he remained the son of itinerant stage performers. This important change endowed Poe with some social and economic aspirations that would remain for the most part of his life, as he strived to escape his original background and be accepted within a newly-acquired social milieu as a Southern gentleman in the United States of America. Likewise, being brought up in England and Scotland for an important period during his adolescence, Poe imbibed the importance attached to social hierarchy, which would eventually come to a close when he was disinherited, and thus, excluded from the Allan household, once his foster father John Allan remarried and had a family of his own. Conversely, from birth, Bulwer-Lytton was educated with the view to be raised to the peerage and become heir to the Lytton lineage, but when his mother disapproved of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler and threatened to remove her allowance, Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled to write prolifically in order to earn a living on his own. Hence, even if a prospective baronet, Bulwer-Lytton would find himself becoming a self-made man, dependent on his own economic resources, even though, upon the advent of his separation from his wife, his relation with his mother became closer and he regained her favour as heir to the Lyttons. Accordingly, while Bulwer-Lytton was an aristocrat who was required to make a name by himself and ultimately regain his privilege, from being an orphan of humble origins, Poe suddenly became the foster son and expected successor of a wealthy merchant and living in Europe only to be disinherited and debarred from the Allan household later on in his life. Hence, in both cases, the former situations befalling the authors were brought to a halt, requiring them to adapt to new circumstances which conditioned their eventual different modalities of aging.

As a result of his European upbringing and his sudden rejection on the part of his foster father, John Allan, Poe felt compelled to live fast, moving continuously across

the country, and metaphorically, aging prematurely. In this respect, it could be claimed that Poe was caught unprepared, being required to make the transition between an old order that he had imbibed from childhood and a new cultural, social, and political situation that was emerging in his country at the time, rejecting the order of the old continent and turning to the worship of novelty and youth, leaving behind his European roots in order to forge an identity of his own. Conversely, since birth, Bulwer-Lytton was raised being aware of the duties he would have to fulfil as successor of his family lineage, and aware that this fate would only be accomplished late in life, he envisioned aging in a remarkably positive way, as an enriching stage in life, whereby individuals could profit from their experience and enjoy a quieter and more introspective stage in life. However, deeply committed to the ethics of self-help and having made a name by himself as a highly-esteemed Victorian writer, he was enabled to look upon the future of his nation, the colonies that had become independent where young individuals could find an opportunity to attain success as entrepreneurs, and he could also look upon the continuation of his own lineage as personified by his son Robert, which allowed him to ascertain, in his old age, that his lifetime duties had been fulfilled. As pointed out in the different chapters of this thesis, in the course of their lives, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe shared some symbolic transitions, which were transposed in the literary fictions that they wrote at different stages of their aging process, until they underwent a crucial turning-point – a significant rite of passage – that would condition their different modalities of aging from then onwards, which were also symptomatic of the perceptions of aging mostly prevailing in their respective cultures at the time.

The comparative analysis of Poe's classical tale "The Assignment" and Bulwer-Lytton's romantic novella *Falkland* reflects the initial symbolic transitions befalling both authors in terms of the influence of their parental background, the demise of their first love, and the beginning of their literary endeavours. By means of resorting metaphorically to classical tenets of the tradition of courtly love in their early fictions, such as the figurative presence of a male knight – personified by Falkland and the Byronic stranger – an idealised lady – represented by Emily and the Marchesa – and illicit love – through the haunting figures of the husbands, Mandeville and Mentoni –

both authors transposed the troublesome marriage of their respective parents in their fictions, as Poe had to bear his foster father's accusations that his sister Rosalie was not the daughter of his biological father, David Poe, while in his autobiography, Bulwer-Lytton brought to the fore the biographical episode in which, in the course of her marriage, his mother, Elizabeth Barbara, out of her high sense of duty, dismissed the advances of one suitor, who pretended her, although she was married to General Bulwer. Likewise, through the tragic end that both heroines in Poe's tale and Bulwer-Lytton's novella eventually meet, both authors also paid homage to one of the most dramatic experiences they had to endure early in life, which involved their idealised love for an elder woman – Lucy in the case of Bulwer-Lytton, and Jane Stanard in the case of Poe – and their eventual tragic and premature death as a result of illness. In addition to a series of features pertaining to the tradition of courtly love as a result of the chivalric literary works they perused in their youth, Bulwer-Lytton's early novella and Poe's early tale also display the significant influence that Lord Byron exerted on the authors at the beginning of their literary career. Both Falkland and the stranger in the respective fictions of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe are necessarily remindful of the figure of Lord Byron, and the attraction that both authors showed towards the English bard was taken as evidence of precociousness, in the case of Bulwer-Lytton, and as a sign of immaturity, in the case of Poe, as his foster father, John Allan, believed that Poe's emulation of these romantic tenets came hand-in-hand with the irresponsible behaviour that he believed characterised the early years of his foster son. It is also significant to notice that aging plays an important role in the portrayal of the different characters, as, in Bulwer-Lytton's novella, Emily undergoes a quickened process of aging as a result of her feeling of guilt, which underlines her metaphorical moral debacle, while, conversely, Falkland no longer feels older than his age, as he abandons his seclusion and taciturn habits, and rather, seems to undergo a process of rejuvenation following the beginning of his illicit affair with Emily. Similarly, in Poe's tale, the Marchesa is deprived of her aura as a symbolic goodess, and metaphorically, turns into a living woman, as a result of her affair, which awakens her into life, but also unleashes her aging process. In both texts, the aging traits that the female protagonists acquire, which

are linked to their illicit affairs, seem to be inextricably related to ethical issues. Judging from the tragic end of these early fictions, Poe's tale "The Assigination" and Bulwer-Lytton's novella *Falkland* also evince the metaphorical farewell on behalf of both authors to the ideals of their youth, even though *Falkland* is ultimately symptomatic of Bulwer-Lytton's high sense of duty and responsibility, which would extend throughout his lifetime and would condition his approach towards aging, while "The Assigination" displays Poe's partiality towards these romantic ideals, which would urge him to defend himself from accusations of ingenuousness and would lead him to start lying about his age at this stage, pretending to be older than he was to counteract these prejudices, and thus, even if unconsciously, gaining an early insight into the constructive quality of aging.

The study of the intertextualities between Bulwer-Lytton's silver-fork novel *Pelham* and Poe's satirical piece "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" reflects the symbolic transition of the process of coming out in society of both authors, their gradual awareness of the importance attached to social conventions, the presentation of the self in society, and how the approach to aging is ultimately revealed as socially and culturally constructed. As a result of their early stay abroad – as Bulwer-Lytton lived in Paris, and Poe stayed in London for a few years – the authors gained insight into the constructed quality of social interactions precisely from their perspective as foreigners, since the male protagonists of these fictions, Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison also live abroad for a period of time, and adopt and display social conventions in their interactions, but they also complain and ultimately show the counterfeited quality characterising the process of socialising. During his stay in Paris, Bulwer-Lytton became acquainted with the prevailing fashionable cult of the dandy, which he adopted, while, during his academic education in England, Poe became initiated into a highly stratified society according to social class, which allowed him to become familiar with social prejudices that would condition his existence significantly, even upon returning to the country of his birth. Nonetheless, as his literary hero Henry Pelham reveals in his homonymous novel, Bulwer-Lytton exposed the necessary interplay existing between aesthetics and ethics, as Pelham socialises and takes

advantage of social interactions, but he also gradually ages and matures, as he learns to distinguish genuineness from mere appearances, since he personifies an ethical and moralising kind of dandy figure. Conversely, though, Poe's literary character Patrick O'Grandison holds on to social conventions and aesthetics, and sarcastically, in spite of boasting about excelling in social interactions, he fails in his purposes, as he is unable to look beyond the faked conventions characterising life in society. In this respect, if Henry Pelham eventually manages to unveil the real identity of his apparent antagonist Reginald Glanville, and in doing so, he also becomes closer to his sister Ellen whom he finally marries, Patrick O'Grandison is unable to perceive how alike he is in comparison with his rival, the Frenchman, and it is owing to his lack of social competence that he fails to court Mistress Tracle. Through their interactions with their antagonists and the courting of female socialites, it is argued that both Henry Pelham and Patrick O'Grandison age through the figure of the other, and both Bulwer-Lytton's silver-fork novel and Poe's social satire present mirror scenes in which the main character looks at himself in the mirror or mirrors himself in the movements of his antagonist. In terms of aging, scenes in which characters look into their aged other and identify or fail to recognise themselves in the image they see evince their positioning with respect to their process of aging. It is thus significant to notice that it is while being disguised as an old man that Henry Pelham helps to acquit Reginald Glanville from unjust accusations and exonerate himself for having judged him wrong, thus ultimately reflecting his own process of aging, whereas in Poe's tale, Patrick O'Grandison depicts his rival as an aged man, and even though he continuously emulates all his movements, Patrick O'Grandison fails to recognise himself as aged and the Frenchman as his own spitting image. Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* and Poe's tale "Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" underscore the social process of aging of both authors, as they socialised in foreign societies, compared themselves with their male friends and antagonists, and courted female socialites until they met their respective wives. As another example of aging through the other, the age of their wives – Virginia being remarkably younger than Poe, and Rosina being slightly older than Bulwer-Lytton – also conditioned the process of aging of the authors in relation to them, as Virginia's

remarkable youth underlined his aging, while it also granted him virtual youth, whereas Rosina's age underscored Bulwer-Lytton's mature ways, but it would also be ultimately taken as an excuse for the eventual failure of his marriage.

The identification of parallelisms between Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* and Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd" also gives evidence of the symbolic transition consisting in the process of individuation of both authors during their aging, insofar as Bulwer-Lytton grew detached from his mother as a result of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler, and Poe grew estranged from his foster father when, after the tragic death of Frances Allan, John Allan married again and had a family of his own. As both authors gradually became independent from their respective families in the course of their symbolic process of individuation, metaphorically, they also illustrated the clash between the Jungian figures of 'the persona' and 'the shadow' – the image projected in society, and the instinctive part of the self – which found its reflection in the first incursion of the authors in the genre of crime fiction. Both *Paul Clifford* and "The Man of the Crowd" revolve around the figure of a criminal and his discontinuous relation of inclusion and exclusion with respect to their respective societies, and this intermittent connection is symbolised in the fictions as the character of Paul Clifford feels unjustly oppressed by the legal institutions prevailing at the time, and in Poe's tale, the narrator initially remains an external observer, but subsequently, he also joins the mob, as he pursues the man of the crowd along the streets. Through his novel *Paul Clifford*, Bulwer-Lytton sought to expose the injustice of the prevailing penal laws, as the hero of the novel finally becomes an expatriate, and it is in a foreign land that he becomes successful as a self-made man. Similarly, the narrator of Poe's tale paces along the streets of London and notices the hierarchical quality of the English society as he identifies different social classes, while he also notices dissimilarities in comparison with some American cities, as Poe recollected his years of youth in England. In both cases, as they grew detached from their families and societies as individuals, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe envisioned an alternative existence through their fictions, since, despite being born an aristocrat, Bulwer-Lytton felt attracted towards the ethics of self-help, while, in spite of his humble origins, Poe would always aspire to attain the privileged

social status that he had enjoyed in his youth with the Allans in England. Likewise, the process of individuation of the protagonists is also brought to the fore in these fictions through the discontinuous relation of the characters with respect to their families, which is mostly represented by the symbolic use of names, which, in turn, reflects Bulwer-Lytton's symbolic use of his family names to identify with his different roles as an aristocrat and as a self-made man as a writer, while Poe also gave evidence of his growing sense of individuality, as he gradually preferred his own family name, Poe, to the detriment of that of his foster family, the Allans. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Paul Clifford makes use of different names of his own creation in the course of his social gatherings and of his criminal endeavours as a member of a gang, and finally, sticks to a self-invented name rather than to his actual family name, thus sanctioning his eventual estrangement from his family, while, in Poe's tale, the significant lack of name of the narrator, as well as of the man of the crowd, ultimately symbolises the fluctuating quality characterising self-identity, also as symptomatic of Poe's personal situation at the time with regard to his foster family. Finally, as paradigms of crime fiction, both Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Paul Clifford* and Poe's tale "The Man of the Crowd" revolve around the crime of theft, which acquires symbolic connotations, as, at some point in their lives, Poe had to bear the accusations of having stolen some tokens from his foster family, while Bulwer-Lytton would always remember having subtracted a token from a friend of his grandfather's when he was a child or having been chosen heir to his mother's estate to the detriment of his own father. These actual events were transposed in their fictions, as, in Poe's tale, the man of the crowd is alleged to have stolen some valuables, whereas, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Paul is accused of having stolen a watch from a wealthy man, who is finally revealed to be his father, thus he literally steals time from his father and claims what one day would be his own before due course. Accordingly, in terms of aging, these biographical as well as fictional episodes ultimately underscore the process of individuation of the authors, as they gradually grew detached from their families and became independent individuals, having a family of their own and having symbolically replaced the emblematic figure of the absent father, even if noticeably with different success, as Bulwer-Lytton began to make a name for

himself as a highly-reputed writer in order to earn a living, while Poe gradually realised that he would have to leave behind the privileged social status that he had looked forward to attaining as a Southern gentleman in his much coveted position as heir to the Allans.

The comparative consideration of Bulwer-Lytton's crime novel *Eugene Aram* and Poe's early detective tale "Thou Art the Man," inasmuch as these fictions were published at a time when both writers began to acquire fame and reputation, brings to the fore the growing insight of the authors into their public status and role as writers, while, insofar as the plots of these crime fictions tackle issues such as blame and retribution explicitly, they also underscore significant personal aspects regarding guilt and expiation befalling the authors at an important symbolic transition of their literary careers. As Bulwer-Lytton grew detached from his mother after getting married without her consent, while Poe remained ever estranged from his foster father, both authors underlined an acute sense of self-sufficiency at this stage, metaphorically acquiring a more conscientious and even more self-moralising role in the absence of their parents and symbolically underlining the Freudian psychic figure of the superego in their personalities that was ultimately transposed in their fictions, which at this stage dealt significantly with issues related to guilt and conscience. Owing to the hectic period of hard work that both authors underwent at the time, as Bulwer-Lytton and Poe looked for the isolation that would allow them to indulge in writing, in their role as intellectual men, their fictions *Eugene Aram* and "Thou Art the Man" address the fallacy of superior individuals, such as the protagonists of Bulwer-Lytton's novel and Charles Goodfellow in Poe's tale, who believe themselves to be above the rest and trespass the moral and legal boundaries of right and wrong. In a period of important literary drudgery and of willing isolation to fulfil his professional engagements, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned an eminently Faustian character, Eugene Aram, based on an actual crime case, whom Bulwer-Lytton found out to have been somehow related to his family, as, in real life, Eugene Aram had been tutor to Bulwer-Lytton's paternal aunts. Feeling somehow identified with this intellectual character owing to the kind of life he led at the time and the personal connection that related him to the actual criminal on whom his character

was based, Bulwer-Lytton turned him into the hero of one of his novels and even showed an unusual sympathy for a character guilty of murder. Bulwer-Lytton's choice of a criminal as the hero of his novel would ultimately attract disapproval on behalf of critics and would lead him to write a series of articles to justify himself and even change some significant aspects of his novel to condemn Eugene Aram's actions more explicitly, as a result of the importance that Bulwer-Lytton would always attach to his public image and the moralising tone that he mostly intended to convey in his literary works. Conversely, in his early detective tale "Thou Art the Man," in which the detective and narrator manages to unveil the real identity of a much socially acclaimed man in town, Charles Goodfellow, who is ultimately found to be guilty of murder, Poe symbolically envisioned a fiction whereby he intended to defend himself from a personal wrong that he had endured in his determination to make a name for himself as a renowned writer. Having shown his praise for Charles Dickens in the course of their meeting during the English writer's trip to the United States, Poe appeared to recognise Dickens as the author of a critical note against him published in the press, and the vindictive tone characterising his tale "Thou Art the Man" at the time seemed to respond to Poe's urge to expose the truth and ironically accuse the English writer of being the author of this defamatory note accusing Poe of being an imitator. Accordingly, in these fictions, Bulwer-Lytton and Poe explicitly tackled crime and punishment, as these literary works reflected the feelings of guilt and self-vindication of the authors at this stage of their professional careers. In this period of growing consciousness of their role as writers, it is also significant to notice that aging plays an important part in characterising the criminals of these fictions, as Eugene Aram looks younger than his chronological age, but often feels older than he actually is as a result of his misdeed in the past, while Poe's tale is grounded in a stereotypical perception of old age, as, in the tale, most citizens from town take for granted that old Charles Goodfellow is an innocent and honest man, merely basing their judgment on his aging appearance.

A comparative analysis of Bulwer-Lytton's historical novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* and Poe's seminal tale "The Fall of the House of Usher," underlines one of the

most significant symbolic transitions in the lives of both authors which conditioned their process of aging significantly from then onwards. In both fictions, the architectural collapse of a stately home in Poe's tale and of the classical city of Pompeii in Bulwer-Lytton's novel becomes a metaphor that underscores the troublesome domestic events befalling both authors, as Bulwer-Lytton had to face the end of his marriage, while Poe bore witness to his sanctioned debarment from the Allan household upon the death of his foster father, even though both writers would adopt a significantly different attitude towards their domestic troubles, as the outcome of these two fictions ultimately show. Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" can be interpreted as an elegy to the ultimate debacle of the Allan family, and acquires a consistent allegorical meaning, inasmuch as the House of Usher turns into a literary transposition of the stately home of the Allans, which was known as Moldavia. The ultimate collapse of the house in Poe's tale as a result of the moral corruptibility of their inhabitants necessarily evokes Poe's eventual realisation of his foster father's reprehensible conduct with respect to his wife, in spite of his allegiance with the principles of Masonry. Precisely, the close connection between the symbol of a house and the principles of Masonry establishes an inherent bond between the family house and the figure of a patriarch, as is the case with John Allan and Moldavia, and in its fictional transposition, the character of Roderick Usher and the House of Usher, and accordingly, the moral debacle of the patriarch also brings about the fall of the family manor. This same moral debacle befalls the city of Pompeii in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, as the author envisioned *The Last Days of Pompeii* at a troublesome period of his marriage to Rosina, when the ghost of unfaithfulness haunted their relationship, which appeared to be doomed to an end. As happens in Poe's tale, in which the existence of a fissure involves the imminent collapse of the House of Usher, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, the eruption of Vesuvius threatens to destroy Pompeii, and in particular, the temple of the priest Arbaces, as a reification of the pagan beliefs that are symbolically corrupting the city of Pompeii. Given the fact that Bulwer-Lytton's father, General Bulwer, was a Mason – like Poe's foster father, John Allan – in his fiction Bulwer-Lytton would establish a connection between architectural structures and moral principles, as, in his historical novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, the physical debacle of a

civilisation, personified by Arbaces, and the rise of a new society, symbolised by Glaucus and Ione, involve the moral regeneration of a civilisation, and at a more personal level, Bulwer-Lytton's fictionalisation of his wish to leave behind the failure of his marriage and start a new stage in his life. Significantly enough, both Bulwer-Lytton's novel and Poe's tale ultimately address the clash between aging and youth, insofar as they portray the death of aging patriarchs, Arbaces and Roderick Usher, and the subsequent survival of a young couple, Glaucus and Ione, and the narrator who abandons the remains of the House of Usher at the end of Poe's tale. Given their ultimate allegorical meaning, as both fictions portray the rise and fall of architectural structures, and by extension, they reflect the ups and downs of the domestic situations the authors underwent at the time, there is a parallelism established between the construction and deconstruction of houses and the writing and unwriting of texts, since, by means of creating their respective fictions, the authors established a connection between houses and texts, as they 'constructed' the story of the houses, while the fictionalised houses became emblems that symbolised the stories of the families they represented, and by extension, the personal stories of the authors. The final outcome of both fictions also unveils the different interpretations that both authors offered with respect to the symbolic transitions they had to bear at this stage of their life, since, through the fall of the House of Usher, Poe was metaphorically exposing the end of his relation with the Allans and his realisation that he had been omitted from John Allan's will, while through the survival of Glaucus and Ione in *The Last Days of Pompeii*, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned a brighter end to his novel as a counterpart to the failure of his marriage to Rosina. These symbolic transitions conditioned the process of aging of both authors in a different manner, as Poe's exclusion from the Allan household would sanction the prospects of attaining the social status that he had coveted for most of his life up to then, whereas the end of Bulwer-Lytton's marriage to Rosina would ultimately imply regaining his mother's favour and endorsing himself as legitimate heir of the Lyttons.

The analysis of the intertextualities between Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Caxtons* and Poe's tale "The Black Cat" reflects the approach of both authors towards life in

domesticity and how this affected their attitude towards aging and their late years. Through his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton tried to envision a brighter picture of his life in domesticity in comparison with his troublesome marriage to Rosina and the distant relationship he had with his children, Emily and Robert, while Poe's tale "The Black Cat" transposes the gloomy atmosphere that characterised the author's marriage to Virginia, especially during the anguishing course of her illness until her tragic and premature demise. Both fictions address the subject of gender politics, in particular, issues related to masculinities, emasculation, and masculinisation, insofar as both texts revolve around a male character – Augustine Caxton in Bulwer-Lytton's novel and an unnamed narrator in Poe's tale – that metaphorically undertakes a gradual process of emasculation as a result of feeling trapped in a domestic scenario. Given the prototypes of masculinity that emerged at the time, which were for the most part associated with physical strength owing to the movement known as Muscular Christianity or with economic solvency as a result of the ethics related to the figure of the self-made man, the intellectual type of masculinity that Augustine Caxton exemplifies as he writes his philosophical treatise or the apparent lack of profession of the unnamed narrator in Poe's tale underscore their gradual process of emasculation. In Poe's tale "The Black Cat," in order to escape what he perceives as the stifling atmosphere characterising the domestic setting in which he feels trapped, the narrator resorts to physical violence against his pet cat, which he associates with the home, in an attempt to defend himself from his threatened masculinity. Similarly, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Caxtons*, young Pisistratus is presented with different prototypes of masculinity exemplified by his uncles Roland and Jack, his cousin Francis Vivian, and his father, Augustine Caxton, while he finally decides to hold on to the prevailing discourse of imperialism and emigrate in order to become a successful self-made man and make a name for himself. By means of his novel *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton envisioned an edifying literary work addressed to his son Robert, with whom the author had a distant, but gradually, closer relationship, as, through frequent letters, Bulwer-Lytton supervised the education of his son, advising him to leave behind his aspirations to emulate him as a renowned writer, and instead, like Pisistratus Caxton in the novel, become a man of the

colonies. Likewise, through imagining a blissful picture of domesticity as presented in *The Caxtons*, Bulwer-Lytton also endeavoured to exorcise the nerve-wracking relationship that he would always have with Rosina after the end of their marriage, and especially, after the tragic and unexpected death of their daughter at a very young age. Bulwer-Lytton envisioned the character of Augustine Caxton in the years of his maturity, as he imagined his old age living in quiet domesticity and with a closer relationship with his son Robert, who, together with his wife Edith, would take care of him in his late years. Conversely, though, in his gothic tale of domesticity, “The Black Cat,” Poe tried to purge his haunting experience in domesticity, as he bore witness to the gradual deterioration of his young wife Virginia and looked after her in the last years of her life. The premature death of Virginia at such a young age necessarily unleashed Poe’s process of aging, as he once more had to undertake a tragic symbolic transition that would make him grow virtually older and out of time, as he found himself a childless widower, emotionally dependent on the care of his aunt and mother-in-law, as well as on a series of women, as he established a series of romantic relationships towards the end of his life, to the point of being engaged to get married at the moment of his death.

The study of the intertextualities between Bulwer-Lytton’s allegorical novel *A Strange Story* and Poe’s pseudoscientific gothic tale “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” reveals the views of the authors with respect to medical and metaphysical issues, as a result of the experience that both authors had in taking care of diseased relatives, since Bulwer-Lytton had to bear the illness and death of his daughter and his mother, while Poe also attended to his wife until the last days of her life. In the course of looking after their relatives, both Bulwer-Lytton and Poe became acquainted with different members of the medical profession as well as with medical treatments, but given their own respective conditions in the last years of their life, both authors would often switch roles from being carers to turning into patients themselves. Poe’s letters to his aunt Maria Clemm at this stage of his life reveal Poe’s physical vulnerability and emotional dependence, while the letters that Bulwer-Lytton would address to his partners in politics also disclosed his intention to retire from office as a result of his

precarious health. In both cases, the condition befalling the two authors unveils a significant psychosomatic quality that ascertains the important interaction established between the mind and the body, and the mutual influence that they exert on each other. As a result of these personal circumstances, the fictions that they wrote at the time revolve around the medical profession and alternative treatments such as mesmerism, the mutual influence of the mind and the body, and metaphysical issues about the transcendent and the afterlife. Bulwer-Lytton's *A Strange Story* can be interpreted as an allegory, since the characters of Allen Fenwick, Lilian Ashleigh and Margrave symbolically personify the mind, the body, and the soul, thus turning Bulwer-Lytton's novel into a religious defence upon the advent of Darwinian evolutionary theories, while Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" reveals the author as a materialist who finds in his writings an actual entry into immortal life through art. In both fictions, the significant role attached to the practice of mesmerism also turns into an apt metaphor that addresses their literary gifts as writers in the last years of their life, since, in their role as authors, they become symbolic mesmerisers only to find themselves mesmerised in their writings. Likewise, the allegorical and philosophical vein underlying Bulwer-Lytton's novel *A Strange Story* once more reveals the Victorian writer's lifetime ponderings and his consciousness about aging, whereas Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," inasmuch as the character of Valdemar dies while being mesmerised, his life is sustained only through the will of the mesmeriser, as Valdemar has truly been dead for long, once more underscoring Poe's metaphorical process of aging as abrupt and premature as a result of personal as well as cultural circumstances.

This study has compared a representative selection of literary works and significant aspects of the life of two nineteenth-century writers, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe, who lived contemporarily on the two sides of the Atlantic, focusing on the relation between important turning-points in their lives and their literary creativity as representative of different stages in their life-course. This comparative analysis has shown that many aspects of their biographies and of their literary works display considerable parallelisms, underscoring the fact that, despite their different

national and social backgrounds, the creative drive of these two writers, as well as the symbolic transitions that these two authors underwent during their respective aging processes, involve surprising similarities. In retrospect, these parallelisms and similarities can only be put down to coincidence, but the roots of such coincidence must be found to some degree in the influence on Poe of his readings of Bulwer-Lytton's fiction, in the literary fame that Bulwer-Lytton had acquired as an author in Victorian times, and of a shared cultural mind-set, responding in part to the the cultural synergy established between Great Britain and the United States during the first half of the nineteenth-century. This study of the literary works of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe reveals that their literary creativity, which reflects the personal transitions that they went through in their respective processes of aging, was generated by specific emotional and psychological circumstances, and was also culturally- and socially-conditioned, thereby underscoring the premise that aging is a constructed discourse. The emotions that both authors experienced as they passed the different stages of their respective life courses gave shape to their creativity and writing persona, and became manifest in the literary works they produced at different phases of their lives, to the extent that their works can be interpreted as fictionalisations of the emotions involved in the symbolic transitions that these authors underwent.

This analysis has also approached issues related to the personal identity of these two authors through the identification of a series of symbolic transitions in their lives. These symbolic transitions gave way to different modalities of aging as Bulwer-Lytton and Poe grew older, so that the articulation of these transitional stages in works of literature renders the respective aging processes of these two writers of symbolic cultural value. Furthermore, this thesis has also sought to address issues related to the public status of these two writers and to the evolving critical reception of each one in the countries of their birth. Poe gained the favour of the literary canon gradually, especially through his critical reception abroad, while Bulwer-Lytton fell out of favour with British readerships, following the end of the Victorian period, the end of Empire, and in particular, the advent of modernism. This study of the intertextuality in the literary works of Bulwer-Lytton and Poe reconsiders Poe's acknowledged legacy in

relation to the influence that Bulwer-Lytton exerted on him, and constitutes a reappraisal of Bulwer-Lytton as a Victorian writer who contributed significantly to laying the groundwork for a great tradition in English literature, for posterity.

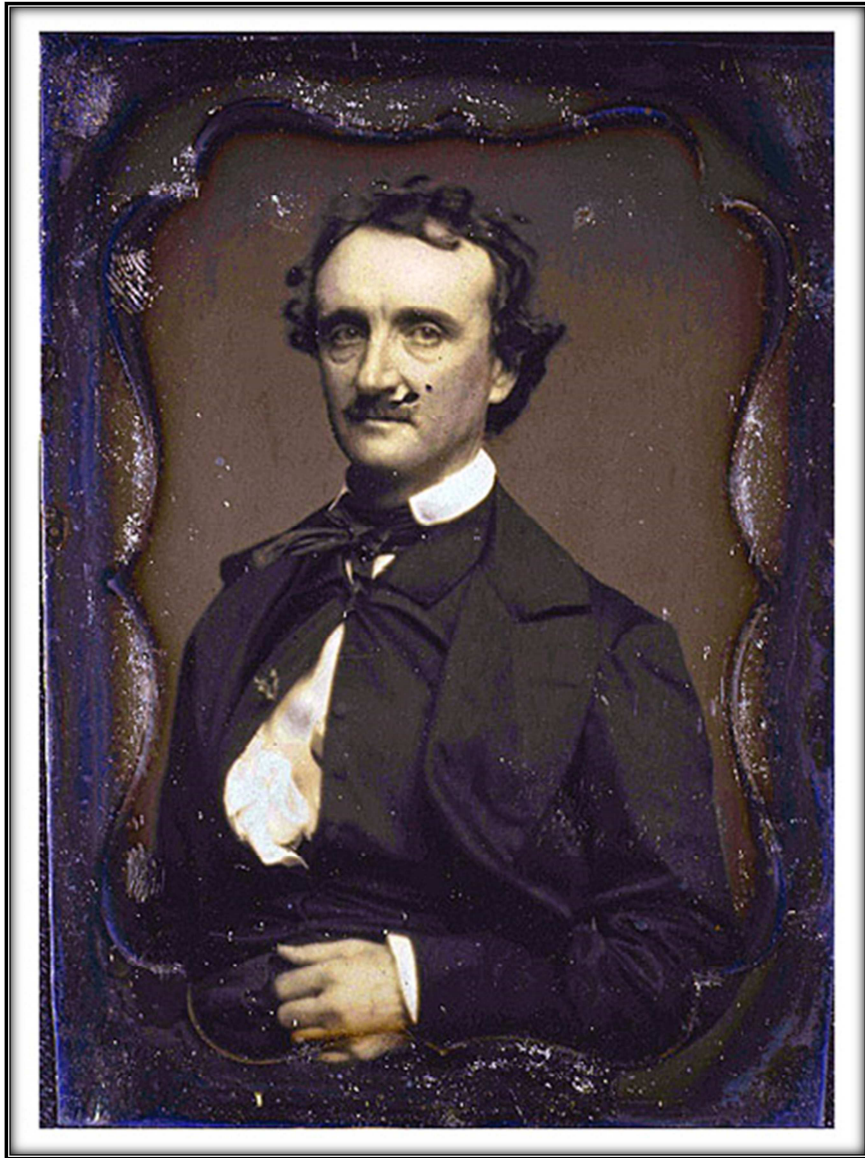


Figure 11 - Poe in the 'Thompson' daguerreotype, in 1849.

Taken from: Michael Deas. *The Portraits and Daguerreotypes of Edgar Allan Poe*.

(Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989): 54.



Figure 12 - Edward Bulwer-Lytton in a photograph by John Watkins in the early 1870s, exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

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