

Guilty of 'Penning' a Newgate Criminal as a Hero for Posterity

Edward Bulwer-Lytton and the Case of *Eugene Aram*

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Abstract. By means of the fictionalisation of an actual criminal case from *The Newgate Calendar*, involving an enigmatic but appealing scholar, Edward Bulwer-Lytton provided an enthralling portrayal of a murderer which featured a criminal as the hero of his novel *Eugene Aram* (1832). In spite of its instant success, *Eugene Aram* stirred strong critical objections, which were mostly interpreted on account of its dubious morality and led the author to defend the right to indulge in crime and sensation. This article seeks to prove that the harsh critical reception that *Eugene Aram* met mostly responded to aesthetic rather than moral reasons, since, through Bulwer-Lytton's double aim of attaining popularity, but also posthumous fame as a writer, he subverted established literary conventions and introduced narratological devices to create an ambivalent portrayal of a criminal, with the aim to turn him into a memorable character, that would ultimately contribute significantly to the development of crime fiction.

Keywords: Newgate fiction, popularity, posterity, crime, sensation, critical reception, ethics, aesthetics.

1. Introduction

As Richard Altick explains in his seminal study of criminal cases in Victorian times, in the nineteenth-century, crime became a pervasive social phenomenon and sensational murders were often publicised in the press (1972: 17), from highbrow journals to street broadsheets. The nineteenth-century genre known as Newgate fiction refers to crime novels based on accounts taken from *The Newgate Calendar*, which derives its name from London's Newgate Prison, where criminals remained before their trial and eventual execution. *The Newgate Calendar* kept a record of notorious actual crimes and, subsequently, turned into a series of anthologies of true criminal biographies that began to be compiled in the United Kingdom in the early decades of the eighteenth-century. According to Stephen Knight, a comprehensive anthology of five volumes, derived from *The Newgate Calendar*, was already published in the year 1773 (2004: 6). The narratives contained in *The Newgate Calendar* mainly had a moralistic aim, featuring individual stories with a frame narrative that comprised the criminal's own confession, which was meant to praise and validate the efficiency of the penal system. Nonetheless, as Heather Worthington claims, these narratives also had a remarkable entertaining component, since reading about the thrilling lives of criminals and their sensational crimes appealed significantly to the public (2010: 14). While the broadsides and ballad sheets publicising crimes were cheap and mainly addressed readers of lower social condition, *Newgate Calendar* anthologies were fairly expensive and mostly aimed at reaching higher social

classes. Given the popularity of these crime narratives, which often blended fact and fiction, periodicals such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* began to appropriate criminal stories from broadsides and publish them on its pages for the delight of the middle classes, thus paving the way for the emergence of Newgate fiction. As Worthington observes, though, if the criminal biographies of *The Newgate Calendar* were meant to warn against crime, their criminals were mostly members of the lower classes and crime was associated with poverty, Newgate fiction rather presented crime as exciting and its heroes were often members of the middle classes, as so were the readers that this emerging genre sought to address (2010: 20). Insofar as they featured violence and crime, Newgate novels shared features with other established and incipient genres, such as picaresque fiction and the gothic romance, as well as the emerging detective narrative, since, in analogy with them, Newgate novels portrayed offenders from every walk of life but associated with the underworld, they included a romantic plot to counteract the tension triggered by the most atrocious passages in the narrative, and they sometimes presented amateur detectives trying to unravel criminal puzzles. However, Newgate novels embraced a genre of their own inasmuch as they featured a criminal, based on a biographical account from *The Newgate Calendar*, who acquired a central prominence in the development of the narrative. As Keith Hollingsworth claims, in Newgate novels, the criminal could become the object of a search, a symptom of social evil or, rather, a study in motivation from an ethical or a psychological perspective (1963: 14), thus already anticipating the popularity that criminal profiles would gain in contemporary crime fiction, or even, in what is known as true crime. In fact, as Worthington argues (2010: 23-4), Newgate fiction would contribute to the emergence of both sensation and detective fiction, since the sensational aspects of Newgate novels would be retained and taken to the core of the domestic sphere in sensation novels, whereas the focus of attention would shift from the figure of the criminal to the process of detection in detective fiction.

Newgate novels immediately became widely read and acquired extraordinary popularity, to the extent that some of the criminals that these novels featured attained the status of celebrities. As Hollingsworth explains, certain circumstantial factors contributed to an unprecedented interest in this kind of crime fiction, such as the prevailing social fear of moral looseness following the Regency period, the changes in legal issues as a result of the passing of the Reform Act in 1832 and the increasing enlargement of the reading population (1963: 16). Nonetheless, as Lauren Gillingham contends, even though British novels of the eighteenth-century had already familiarised readers with crime, the popular acclaim of Newgate novels came hand in hand with a significantly hostile critical reception (2010: 93), as they often met harsh criticism on the grounds of both morality and taste. As James Campbell claims, Newgate fiction became controversial because it raised issues related to the degree of moral responsibility that authors owed to their readership, and the critical opposition that these novels met often gave way to public controversy, which was widely reported in reviews published in influential periodicals of the time (1986: 39). Writers of Newgate novels were frequently charged with shocking moral sensibilities by resorting to sensation, as they presented a sympathetic and even glamorised portrayal of the criminal. As Hollingsworth mentions, this was often the case when the offender,

whose life was turned into fiction, belonged to the middle classes or was a member of the higher classes (1963: 15), thus sanctioning the belief that individuals with respectable connections and privileges were also liable to take the wrong turn and possess a criminal record. Nevertheless, in spite of apparent strong objections on moral and ethical grounds, critics such as Gillingham have more recently referred to the fact that this unfavourable critical reception was mostly based on "the corruption of taste among the higher born" (2010: 94) rather than on actual ethical reasons. After all, it must be acknowledged that the emergence of Newgate fiction was first and foremost a literary phenomenon and, hence, it should circumscribe to the domain of literature. Even if based on actual criminal cases from *The Newgate Calendar*, Newgate novels came from a literary tradition which found its origins in the fearful villains of the Gothic novel and from depictions of the Romantic hero, whose qualities were transposed to envision the Newgate criminal.

Among the most popular writers of Newgate fiction was Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who showed an outstanding awareness of his readership's demands and produced bestselling Newgate novels which gained extraordinary attention at the time of their publication. In order to prepare his novels, Bulwer-Lytton made use of factual materials that he took from the *Newgate Calendars*, as he used to examine them thoroughly in search of a sensational crime which he could explore in his next book. After the success of his first Newgate novel, *Paul Clifford* (1830), aimed at denouncing society's treatment of the criminal, thus offering an eminently compassionate portrait of a law offender, the Victorian writer decided to pursue this method of research further and choose the actual criminal case of Eugene Aram as the subject of his following Newgate novel. On this occasion, Bulwer-Lytton focused on the curious case of a sordid crime committed by a lonesome, but extraordinarily gifted, scholar, with the literary purpose of providing a psychological study of an unusual criminal mind. Bulwer-Lytton's second Newgate novel, *Eugene Aram* (1832), gained impressive popularity, but it also met strong opposition on apparently ethical and moral grounds, as the author was accused of producing an alluring portrait of an actual murderer and turn a criminal into the Byronic hero of his novel.

As Marie Mulvey-Roberts argues, in his lifetime, Bulwer-Lytton was considered "the apotheosis of the great man" (2001: 115) and his fiction was as widely read as that of his close friend Charles Dickens. The extraordinary popularity that the Victorian writer attained, though, did not exempt him of detractors and harsh criticism, mostly fuelled, as Mulvey-Roberts further claims, by "the very phenomenon of his fame" (2001: 116). Similarly, from a contemporary perspective, in spite of Bulwer-Lytton's significant contribution to the development of the genres of crime and detection, this Victorian writer has hardly been granted any recognition as an originator and has commonly been denied the credit he deserves as "a precursor of sensation fiction" (Mulvey-Roberts 2001: 116), even if the queen of sensation, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, considered him her literary mentor. For most of his literary career, Bulwer-Lytton had to struggle with the tension of being popular and appealing to the masses, and that of attaining a high status as a writer and gaining the favour of the critics. In this respect, as Leslie Mitchell claims, Bulwer-Lytton was often caught up "between fears for his popularity and apprehension about his artistic standing"

(2003: 111). As an author, Bulwer-Lytton knew that, on the one hand, in order to attain greatness, he had to become a popular writer and be accessible to a wider readership, but, on the other hand, he objected to the audience's general taste and considered the serialisation of his novels a vulgar type of publishing. Conversely, Bulwer-Lytton was well aware of the importance of criticism and aspired to be praised in the reviews of his novels, although he also questioned the objectivity of critical judgements and often felt deeply wounded, since, as Mitchell claims, Bulwer-Lytton would often take criticism as "a commentary on his personality" (2003: 114). Consequently, as Richard Salmon puts forward, Bulwer-Lytton faced the dilemma of having to choose between "the transient demands of periodical writing and the aspiration to write for posterity" (2004: 52), between the practice of 'literary lionism,' which exemplified the condition of transient popularity in the public domain, and his literary vocation as an author, which rather sought to transcend temporality and attain posthumous fame. This debate came hand in hand with the modes of writing and publication at the time which comprised, on the one hand, the increasing mode of periodical publication, which bound the writer to immediate and momentary effects, and the formation of the modern literary market through edited books, which afforded authors a condition of writing that surpassed temporal limitations and aspired to posterity.

According to Mitchell, Bulwer-Lytton's major contribution to the Newgate school of writing (2003: xviii), during the decades of the 1830s and 1840s, played a major part in earning him a name, but it was also mostly responsible for cementing his notoriety. Conversely, although Bulwer-Lytton's Newgate novels were ranked among the author's most accomplished works in his lifetime, they no longer seem to enjoy the popularity they attained in Victorian times. As this article will seek to prove, through the examination of the writing process and critical reception of Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram*, it can be argued that the challenges that Bulwer-Lytton's Newgate novels and, in particular, *Eugene Aram* had to bear, evoke the same predicament that Bulwer-Lytton had to face as an author. It can be claimed that Bulwer-Lytton wrote to attract the attention of the masses, but, above all, to reach posthumous fame, hence ultimately writing sensation fiction with a view to posterity. His Newgate novels can thus be considered popular fiction with an intellectual bent of mind, while their highbrow artistry was balanced by a blatant will to indulge in crime fiction and its shocking details. Bulwer-Lytton thus defied the constraints of genre as well as the prevailing conditions of the literary market which divided authors between attending to the demands of the audience or those of critics, and which often obliged writers to choose between popularity and literary artistry. Even if inadvertently, through his Newgate novels and particularly through his novel *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton subverted the traditional notion that sensation could not be intellectual and, conversely, that highbrow literature could not indulge in sensationalism. Ironically, *Eugene Aram* met the same critical opposition on ethical grounds as other representatives of Newgate fiction. In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes between two categories of cultural response, namely the taste of sense, which comprises an uneducated kind of reading indicative of passive readers, and the taste of reflection, which involves an educated type of reading suggestive of reflective readers (1989: 6-7). Bearing in mind Bourdieu's categorisation, critics who opposed Newgate novels were wary

that readers would succumb to the thrilling threats that this fiction posed, thus identifying the general readership as primarily having a taste of sense and being passive readers. However, as will be shown, taking into account Bourdieu's classification, upon writing his Newgate novel *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton rather had in mind an audience with a taste of reflection and addressed a reflective reader who indulged in an educated kind of reading rather than being carried away by the exciting twists of the plot, as passive readers would do. Bulwer-Lytton was hence more interested in reaching enduring fame and in writing for posterity rather than enjoying transient popularity, even though, ironically, contemporary critics judged him harshly for writing sensation and promoting what Bourdieu would call a taste of sense instead of a taste of reflection.

Besides, in her recent study of Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, Shalyn Claggett also claims that the controversy following the publication of Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram* was grounded on "the ethical implications of basing a novel on the life of an actual criminal" (2016: 171). As Claggett further asserts, in *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton decided to retain the murderer's proper name, Eugene Aram, and make use of dramatic irony owing to the general reader's prior knowledge of Eugene Aram's actual criminal case. By so doing, Bulwer-Lytton paved the way for establishing a comparison between the real and the represented in his novel, which brought to the fore ethical assumptions on behalf of critics concerning what an actual criminal's personality must be like. Critics could not accept that a criminal was not characterised as a flat type, and objected to Bulwer-Lytton's portrayal of a complex character with contradictory traits, as a gentle scholar and as a cold-blooded criminal; a literary licence which was considered neither plausible nor ethical. Despite the fact that it has often been claimed that harsh reviews of *Eugene Aram* referred to ethical and moral issues, I would like to argue that the controversy following the publication of Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram* was not so much rooted in ethics as it was in aesthetics, since, by means of endowing a criminal with psychological depth in fiction, Bulwer-Lytton was actually subverting literary conventions established at the time and revealing his concern about posterity as an author. By means of analysing Bulwer-Lytton's arrangement of the original facts of the actual criminal case, their transformation into fiction and the critical reception of *Eugene Aram*, I intend to prove that, by means of featuring a criminal as the hero of his novel and endowing him with alluring complexity and ambivalence as a character, Bulwer-Lytton sought to create a sensation hero who would not only be appealing to the masses and attract fleeting popularity, but who would also become a memorable character that would outlive him as an author.

2. Researching for a Newgate novel: the potential popularity of the actual case of Eugene Aram

As Nancy Jane Tyson contends, the criminal case of Eugene Aram appealed significantly to the Victorian literary imagination (1983: 4). The discovery that an apparently quiet and highly-respected scholar had been responsible for an unreasonable murder in cold blood was beyond any human understanding,

especially inasmuch as an act of violence appeared to be at odds with a seemingly peaceful nature and intellectual turn of mind. It might be owing to the dichotomy traditionally established between the public and private spheres deeply ingrained within the Victorian mind-set, which the figure of Eugene Aram appeared to typify, that this criminal case attracted much attention in Victorian times. The original character of Eugene Aram also complied with tenets pertaining to the Byronic hero, insofar as he personified an intellectually gifted individual who rejected established norms and conventions, and displayed remarkable Faustian and Promethean traits, which rendered him close to the literary archetype of the sage who dares play God, such as Faust and even Victor Frankenstein, but whose ambiguous nature and deceitful looks also foreshadow characters of late Victorian gothic narratives, such as Doctor Jekyll, Dorian Gray, and even Dracula. As Hollingsworth notices, Thomas Hood's tragic poem "The Dream of Eugene Aram," published in the annual *The Gem* in 1829, contributed to popularising the case of Eugene Aram, as it became a haunting story for contemporary readership (1963: 84). Owing to its popular acclaim, different literary fictionalisations resulted from the actual case at the time, such as plays and narratives, since the figure of the scholar-criminal appeared to play a pivotal role in fuelling the imagination of Victorian writers.

According to biographer Michael Sadleir, Bulwer-Lytton often displayed opportunism in the choice of the topics for his novels as well as an acute instinct in prejudging popular taste (1931: 275) and, given the fame and notoriety that the story of Eugene Aram had acquired at the time, Bulwer-Lytton soon identified it as a potential choice to turn it into fiction. With the aim of gathering information in order to write his next novel, Bulwer-Lytton thoroughly researched into the criminal case of Eugene Aram, thus ironically finding himself emulating the solipsistic conduct of the scholar-criminal and even the detective work of Walter Lester, Eugene Aram's antagonist in Bulwer-Lytton's novel, who is depicted as an amateur detective ultimately disclosing Eugene Aram's identity and outrageous secret. Hence, although the case of Eugene Aram was well-known in Victorian times, as Hollingsworth claims (1963: 83), Bulwer-Lytton first read about the criminal case of Eugene Aram in the *Newgate Calendar* bulletins, when he was in preparation of his first crime novel, *Paul Clifford*. In his previous novel *Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman* (1828), Bulwer-Lytton had already based a character, Thornton, on the notorious murderer John Thurtell, while, in his later novel *Lucretia; or, The Children of the Night* (1846), Bulwer-Lytton would also model another character, Varney, on a contemporary criminal, Thomas Griffiths Wainwright. On this occasion, the original criminal case which caught Bulwer-Lytton's attention involved the English philologist, Eugene Aram, born of a humble family in Yorkshire, who worked as a schoolmaster in Knaresborough for ten years until he decided to abandon his wife and move to London when a close friend, Daniel Clark, disappeared after obtaining an important amount of goods taken deviously from the tradesmen in town. Years later, when some bones were found in Saint Robert's Cave in Knaresborough and were alleged to be those of Clark, suspicions fell upon Eugene Aram, since his deserted wife had hinted that her husband and a man called Richard Houseman were involved in Daniel Clark's disappearance. When Houseman was arrested and confronted with the bones recently found, he confessed the actual place where

Clark's body had been buried and also implicated Eugene Aram in the murder. Following Houseman's declaration, Eugene Aram was arrested and sent to York for trial, where he conducted his own defence, but was finally found guilty and condemned to be executed. After confessing his guilt and disclosing that the actual purpose of his crime had to do with the discovery of his wife's relationship with Clark, Eugene Aram made an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide in his cell only to be hanged some days later for murder.

Even though Bulwer-Lytton knew that the original criminal case of Eugene Aram had much potential for a novel, the Victorian writer was also well aware that he needed to alter some aspects from the original story to trigger the interest of Victorian readers and transform it from a criminal case into crime fiction. As Lucy Sussex notices, the chronological narratives of crime provided in *The Newgate Calendar* differed significantly from the narrative structure of crime fiction, in which events are reordered and information is withheld for the sake of suspense (2008: 14). The narratives in *The New Calendar* followed a specific structure, mainly providing a detailed biography of the criminal rather than privileging the investigation and solution of the crime. Hence, as Sussex further argues, for writers of crime fiction, true crime taken from periodicals posed a technical challenge (2008: 9), as they had to incorporate the disjointed structure of crime fiction –comprising the story of the crime, as well as the story of the investigation– which was unknown to the existing structure of the novel, as it customarily followed a linear progression. When Bulwer-Lytton fictionalised the actual criminal case of Eugene Aram published in *The Newgate Calendar*, he emulated the latest developments of crime investigation and constructed a plot with two elements, one featuring the criminal, and another one introducing an amateur detective, hence already anticipating Tzvetan Todorov's bipartite structure of crime fiction and contributing significantly to the development of the English crime novel (Sussex 2008: 8-9). Above all, though, Bulwer-Lytton took special interest in the psychological development of Eugene Aram as a complex character, trying to reach a balance between the sensational content he imported from true crime periodicals and his conviction as a writer of crime fiction that "the element of the highest genius [...] is in crime" and that "it is not immoral, it is moral, and of the most impressive and epic order of morals, to arouse and sustain interest for a criminal" (Lytton 1913: 86). In order to accomplish that purpose, Bulwer-Lytton first altered the hero's personality, since, instead of being a schoolmaster, as was the case in the original criminal case, the literary character was turned into an extraordinary, but gloomy, scholar, deeply interested in the sciences of botany and astronomy and, thus, closely associated with nature and concerned about unravelling the secrets of the universe. In Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Eugene Aram is also portrayed as a lonely and reclusive individual who enjoys his solitude and detachment from the outside world and, so, in contrast with the original character, Bulwer-Lytton's literary hero is deprived of a wife and a family of his own. Having introduced this alteration, Bulwer-Lytton also felt obliged to change the original motive that led the actual figure of Eugene Aram to commit murder –taking revenge for his wife's unfaithfulness– and, instead, in the novel, the ultimate motive which leads Eugene Aram to kill his victim, Daniel Clarke, is to rob him 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 to benefit humankind. Finally, if in the original criminal case Eugene Aram tried to commit suicide before his execution, but failed in his attempt and was eventually killed by hanging, Bulwer-Lytton sought to endow his literary hero with some ultimate tragic quality and magnificence and, in his novel, he allows him to take his own life in his cell before being publicly executed, thus defending his literary adaptation of the character of Eugene Aram as a criminal, but also as an eminently Romantic hero.

In addition to endowing his hero with an intellectual and even tragic vein, Bulwer-Lytton also made sure that his literary Eugene Aram presented some qualities which would make him profoundly appealing and even sympathetic to his readership and, with that aim in mind, he introduced a romantic plot in the novel that directly involved the solitary scholar. In the novel, when Eugene Aram's neighbour, the fine-looking and kind-hearted Madeline Lester, daughter of Squire Rowland Lester, sprains her ankle nearby the scholar's house while she is going for a walk with her sister Ellinor, Eugene Aram comes to her aid and she immediately falls in love with this prominent, but mysterious, intellectual, who gradually becomes a regular guest of the Lester family. According to Worthington, a tangled love affair became an essential part of sensation fiction (2010: 24) and, ironically, even if critics of *Eugene Aram* would mostly object to its pervasive sensation elements, as Claggett notices, they mostly referred to Bulwer-Lytton's inclusion of the entirely fictional Lester family in the plot – which propitiated the sensation affair between Madeline Lester and the criminal – as one of the greatest aesthetic achievements of the novel (2016: 178). Besides, in order to ensure that the readership perceived Eugene Aram in a positive light, Bulwer-Lytton also decided to transform the man that the hero slays, Daniel Clarke, into a despicable and depraved character so that, although Eugene Aram's crime would still be considered unlawful from a legal perspective, his misdeed would not be regarded as highly objectionable on behalf of readers, who would ultimately consider the murder as a result of poetic justice. Knowing the intricacies of literary fiction in depth, Bulwer-Lytton also felt the need to create an antagonist to his hero and he devised a parallel plot involving Walter Lester, Rowland Lester's nephew, who competes with Aram for the love of his cousin Madeline, but also acts as an amateurish detective, not only discovering that the murdered Daniel Clarke was actually his father, but also unveiling that Clarke had disappeared years before and had acquired a different identity. Through a sensational twist of the plot, Walter Lester eventually finds out that Eugene Aram is to blame for Daniel Clarke's death, that is, the death of Walter Lester's father.

In the course of exploring and gaining insight into the psychology of the criminal to write his novel, Bulwer-Lytton could not avoid romanticising and even identifying with some traits characterising his hero, who also happens to be the villain in the story. Bulwer-Lytton's narrative strategies contributed to turning Eugene Aram into a rather mysterious and even alluring character for the readership, but also to portraying him as a psychologically complex character for which Bulwer-Lytton even appeared to develop some sort of personal sympathy. As Mitchell claims (2003: 175), in order to do research for his crime novels, Bulwer-Lytton even went as far as moving in disguise among the London criminal classes, learn their jargon and imitate their behaviour, thus merging with them as if he were one of their members, in spite of his actual aristocratic background. The

personal turmoil that the Victorian writer was undergoing at the time also might have contributed to giving shape to the tormented nature that characterises his criminal hero. Bulwer-Lytton must have felt somehow identified with Eugene Aram's economic difficulties, which ultimately lead the criminal hero to commit his crime. As Mulvey-Roberts asserts (2001: 121), Bulwer-Lytton was compelled to write extensively to make a living, since he had been cut off financially by his mother, who disapproved of her son's marriage to Rosina Wheeler. Owing to these circumstances, according to Tyson, the tremendous pressure under which Bulwer-Lytton laboured during the composition of *Eugene Aram* led him to physical debilitation (1983: 66), while his biographer Sadleir also claims that this novel was "an obvious product of over-wrought nerves" (1931: 270), which may have influenced the characterisation of his criminal hero and the author's own sympathy towards him.

However, the reasons why Bulwer-Lytton sympathised with his literary hero not only had to do with the economic constraints and stressful period that he also went through while he was writing the novel. The figure of Eugene Aram also fascinated its author because, along the process of research for his novel, the Victorian writer found out that the actual person on whom his character was based on had been personally connected with his own family. As Bulwer-Lytton's grandson Victor Lytton argues (1948: 47), the scholar Eugene Aram had been a friend of Bulwer-Lytton's paternal grandfather and had also been employed as a tutor to his family. In the course of his investigations, Bulwer-Lytton discovered that his paternal grandfather, Justice Bulwer, as he was commonly known, had hired the scholar, who would later on acquire infamous popularity for being charged with murder, to instruct his daughters during their holidays. Hence, in the preface to the 1840 edition of the novel, Bulwer-Lytton unveils how he learned about the close connection between the real Eugene Aram and his paternal family, as he states that, "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" (v). Bulwer-Lytton's surprising discovery about the connection established between Eugene Aram and his own family unleashed the author's imagination even further to transform the original elements into a sensation gothic romance, but it also contributed significantly to the author's personal commitment to his criminal hero. Drawing on the association between Eugene Aram and Bulwer-Lytton's paternal family, Tyson argues that the Lester family in the novel was possibly related in the author's mind to his ancestors, the Bulwers at Heydon Hall, inasmuch as Squire Rowland Lester is reminiscent of Justice Bulwer, while his daughters in the fiction, Madeline and Ellinor, parallel Bulwer-Lytton's aunts whom Eugene Aram tutored at Heydon (1983: 77). The melodramatic and ill-fated relationship between Eugene Aram and Madeline Lester in the novel thus appears to be rooted in Bulwer-Lytton's fantasies about a liaison between one of his aunts and the scholar Eugene Aram, thus introducing a romantic plot in the novel which would serve the purpose of undermining, but also increasing, the dramatic tension of the plot until Eugene Aram is eventually exposed and apprehended as a murderer.

In preparation for his novel *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton thus relied on the popularity of the actual criminal case at the time and retained some of its shocking

details to appeal to the masses and compose a sensation novel that would attract enormous immediate fame. Nonetheless, owing to certain circumstances, such as his personal sympathy for the character and even his personal attachment owing to the surprising discovery that the actual character had met his own family contributed to endowing this criminal character with unusual eminence and complexity, turning him into the hero of his novel in spite of his criminal records and providing him with a psychological complexity which was most unusual in fictional villains up to then.

3. Taking sides with the villain: narratological devices and a criminal's profile

The use of certain narrative techniques in the novel contributes to creating a favourable, and even multifaceted, characterisation of the scholar-criminal, thus betraying Bulwer-Lytton's dual aim of appealing to the audience as well as creating a character of psychological and literary depth. Even though the action is mediated through an omniscient narrator, its narrative focalisation clearly revolves around the character that gives name to the novel, Eugene Aram, only to discover, to the shock of Victorian readers, that the hero of the novel, with whom they have been taking sides, is also the villain. As Jonathan Grossman claims, in Newgate fiction, the omniscient third-person narration that usually characterises these novels aids in blending the overseeing 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 (2004: 75). As Worthington argues, in contrast, the narratives from *The Newgate Calendar* often comprised a first-person confession on behalf of the criminal followed by a biography of the offender written in the third person (2010: 14). Hence, novels like Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, which became pioneers of the omniscient treatment of the criminal character, ultimately turned into a source of moral dissatisfaction at the time, insofar as they mostly allied an authoritative point of view on society with the subjective perspective of the criminal without establishing any explicit difference between them (Grossman 2004: 75). Newgate novels thus 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 bifocalised perspective inasmuch as the narrator observes at a distance, but also aids in giving shape to the criminal's defence.

Owing to the moral dilemma that it posed at the time, the troublesome narrative technique of omniscience for the psychological exploration of the criminal was subsequently left behind, as shown by the narrative strategies displayed in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*. Collins's novel provides a series of accounts on behalf of different witnesses that eventually lead Sergeant Cuff to solve the case, thus discarding the use of an omniscient narrator to establish, instead, a clear distinction between the figure of the detective and any suspects who may have indulged in criminal behaviour. Conversely, in Bulwer-Lytton's

Eugene Aram, even if inadvertently, the reader's attention remains focalised on the hero, who also happens to be the villain of the narrative, until his identity is disclosed and it is Walter, the amateur detective, who takes over the role of the hero at the end of the novel, when the truth is eventually disclosed to the reader. In spite of having traits pertaining to the detective novel, given the prominent role that the criminal hero plays in the novel in comparison with the detective Walter Lester, *Eugene Aram* can hardly be considered a detective novel *per se*, especially in comparison with Bulwer-Lytton's previous novel *Pelham; or, The Adventures of a Gentleman*, in which Pelham, who is the protagonist of Bulwer-Lytton's eponymous novel, turns into an amateur detective whom Knight considers a transitional character in detective fiction (2004: 12). In this respect, according to Sussex (2008: 8), it can be argued that Bulwer-Lytton establishes the literary link between William Godwin's *Caleb Williams; or, Things As They Are* (1794), featuring the first amateur fictional detective, and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), traditionally regarded as the first English detective novel.

According to Worthington, Bulwer-Lytton appeared to follow a logical progression in his crime fiction, since, in his first Newgate novel, *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, while, in *Eugene Aram*, Bulwer-Lytton rather focuses on the figure of the criminal in order to gain insight into the psychological profile of the delinquent's mind (2004: 63), thus moving from focusing on crime itself to concentrating on the criminal's personality. As Worthington further claims, the criminal figure in Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram* is presented as an "alienated Byronic hero of romance" (2004: 63), thus conveying a compassionate portrayal of the criminal-hero in a highly ambiguous portrait which both appeals and disgusts the reader upon gaining insight into his ambivalent personality. In fact, as Claggett contends, Eugene Aram attains "a high degree of complexity as a character" (2016: 183), and cannot be described as a flat character in spite of being a criminal, but rather as a round and multifaceted individual. In particular, the schism separating the character's appearance from his inner nature bespeaks Bulwer-Lytton's thesis 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 argues, Bulwer-Lytton found a profound sublimity in the notion that each individual possesses an evil demon (1976: 64), and so the author's sympathetic, but eminently ambivalent, portrayal of Eugene Aram responds to Bulwer-Lytton's philosophical belief in the inherent dual quality of human beings. At first, Eugene Aram is mostly depicted as a secluded scholar, stating that "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" (38), thus asserting the criminal scholar's mostly intellectual nature. Nonetheless, throughout the novel, a series of passages also give clear evidence of Bulwer-Lytton's wish to indulge in sensation. As a case in point, when some thieves break into his house at night, Squire Rowland Lester is gladly surprised when Eugene Aram displays his ability with a gun and shoots the thieves to defend the family, as the scholar eloquently confesses, "the darkness is familiar to me [...] I could walk by the edge of a precipice in the darkest night without one false step" (193). Eugene Aram's profile

as a lonely scholar only interested in perusing his books stands in contrast with passages which also depict him as a fitting man of action and adventure. As the scholar establishes a close friendship with the Lesters and begins to court Madeline, there are certain occasions on which the reader is left to wonder whether Eugene Aram is truly the entirely venerable character that he appears to be at first sight. Upon meeting new acquaintances, Eugene Aram refuses to shake hands with his right hand and only gives his left hand, he also avoids going to church with Madeline when she requests his company, while Walter, who competes with Aram for the love of Madeline, witnesses his rival wandering in the forest at night and whispering to himself unintelligible words as if something was tormenting him. In a direct address to the reader, the omniscient narrator of the novel explicitly alludes to Eugene Aram's ambivalent portrait as both a scholar and a man of action, stating that,

it has been the necessary course of our narrative, to portray Aram more often in his weaker moments [...] but whenever he stood in the actual presence of danger, his whole soul was in arms to cope with it worthily: courage, sagacity, even cunning, all awakened to the encounter; and the mind which his life had so austere cultivated repaid him in the urgent season with its acute address and unswerving hardihood (201-2).

The ambiguous description of the criminal hero in Bulwer-Lytton's novel places an important emphasis on the contrast between his appearance and his inner nature, which becomes particularly explicit with regard to the way he is depicted in terms of his aging traits. In this respect, on some occasions, Eugene Aram is depicted as young and innocent-looking in appearance, but aged and terribly cunning in truth. When Eugene Aram becomes engaged to marry the young Madeline Lester, he gradually appears to be younger although he is past the prime of life, and he even admits that "now I have grown a child, and can see around me nothing but hope" (165). Conversely, every time Walter Lester secretly observes the scholar when the latter believes he is alone, the young man concedes that "a fierce and abrupt change broke over the scholar's countenance" (57) and Aram is urged to confess that all scholars "grow old before our time, we wither up, the sap of youth shrinks from our veins" as "the body avenges its own neglect" (58). This ambivalent characterisation of the criminal hero in terms of aging contributes to both concealing and betraying his ambiguous nature which, at times, underlines his revered traits as an extraordinary, gifted scholar and, at times, reveals a surprising rejuvenated quality, mostly pertaining to a man of action, which allows the reader to ponder whether Eugene Aram is truly the meek and compliant individual that he appears to be.

This dualistic quality in Eugene Aram is also conveyed through his portrayal as a tormented individual who must bear the terrible burden of guilt, as it is hinted that this sense of pervasive culpability must be rooted in a loathsome misdeed he committed in the past. Eugene Aram thus arises as an eminently tragic hero, based, as Gillingham claims, on a literary tradition established by William Godwin, Lord Byron and Walter Scott (2010: 95). His compulsion to engage in monologues and ponder in his loneliness betrays a remorse that turns Eugene Aram into a Byronic hero detached from the rest of individuals. In fact, the character of Manfred in Lord Byron's homonymous poem, published in 1817,

exerted a clear influence on Bulwer-Lytton's characterisation of Eugene Aram. In Byron's poem, Manfred is an aristocrat 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 to summon seven spirits from whom he seeks to obtain the gift of forgetfulness. In analogy with Manfred, Eugene Aram often finds himself soliloquising in the forest, showing his incapacity to forget his devious past and his need to justify his misdemeanour. Nonetheless, Eugene Aram is also presented as a lamenting fatalist who tries to convince himself that the murder he committed was strictly a necessary means to an end, which would allow him to pursue his learning with the apparent aim of contributing to human perfectibility. As Hollingsworth further argues, through Eugene Aram's reasoning, Bulwer-Lytton aimed to expose the treacherous fallacy of taking some of the precepts pertaining to Utilitarian ethics too far (1963: 89), inasmuch as Eugene Aram deludes himself into thinking that his criminal misbehaviour actually responds to obtaining the greatest benefit for the greatest number, thus convincing himself that his misdeed cannot be considered an actual crime, as he regards it as a single wrong committed for the sake of humankind's advancement. In this respect, Eugene Aram justifies himself, stating that, "I became haunted with the ambition to enlighten and instruct my race" (353), thus envisioning himself treacherously as a designated individual on whom there has been bequeathed the privilege of ensuring the progress of humanity, which truly arises as Eugene Aram's actual moral transgression in the novel.

Consequently, Eugene Aram is also depicted as a Romantic hero who dares defy established standards and conventions. In his role as a seeker of knowledge who aspires to intellectual eminence, Eugene Aram resembles other figures within the literary tradition, since, as Campbell claims, in order to write his novel, Bulwer-Lytton drew on literary figures that had revived through the rise of Romanticism (1986: 46), as is the case with the mythical Prometheus, the biblical Adam, and the rebellious and intellectual Faust. Like Prometheus in the Greek myth, who steals the fire from the gods to confer it to humanity against the dictates of Zeus, Eugene Aram also believes that his boundless pursuit of knowledge will contribute to enlightening humankind, even if it involves disobeying both human and divine laws. In resemblance with the biblical Adam, Eugene Aram also falls from grace into temptation and is metaphorically expelled from Paradise, that is, barred from the happiness that awaits him with his beloved Madeline once his sin is exposed. Above all, though, Bulwer-Lytton particularly based the character of Eugene Aram on Faust, as depicted in Goethe's masterpiece, to the extent that Eugene Aram justifies his misdeed declaring that "everyone knows the magnificent moral of Goethe's *Faust* [...] the yearning for the intellectual Paradise beyond" (121), so that an explicit intertextual link is established between Faust and the character of Eugene Aram, as they are both depicted as perpetual seekers of knowledge who are doomed for their unfathomable intellectual ambition.

In spite of Eugene Aram's boundless pursuit of knowledge which goes beyond established standards of ethics, Bulwer-Lytton's portrayal of this scholar-criminal often entices readers to feel sympathy and regard him as an eminently tragic figure who, despite being guilty of murder, is also a victim of fate. In this respect, as Campbell contends, Bulwer-Lytton's narrative depicts an individual who

commits “a terrible act of violence at variance with his whole nature” (1986: 45), which ultimately proves of no consequence since, due to an astounding turn of circumstances which takes place shortly after his crime, he ironically finds out that he is an unlucky victim of fate. As he states in a letter of confession which he addresses to Walter Lester, Eugene Aram admits that, although he murdered Daniel Clarke to provide himself with enough money to devote his life to the pursuit of knowledge, only three days after he has committed the crime, he is informed that a recently deceased relative has named him sole inheritor of his fortune. Upon learning about this tragic and ironic twist of circumstances, Eugene Aram exclaims in his letter that, “had I waited but three little days!” and admits that “when they told me, I thought I heard the devils laugh out at the fool who had boasted wisdom” (361), thus referring to the ultimate futility of his crime and realising that destiny was punishing him for his arrogance and conceit upon believing himself of a superior mind. Bearing in mind these circumstances, Eugene Aram is reported to be a criminal, but, for the most part, he is also portrayed as a victim of fate, who falls prey to his immoral ambitions and is harshly punished for daring trespass the boundaries separating good from evil.

Hence, even though the character of Eugene Aram stirred objections from “the morally-minded reader” (Mulvey-Roberts 2001: 116) and Bulwer-Lytton’s rhetorical decisions to turn an actual criminal into a hero created “an ethical dissonance” (Claggett 2016: 178), Bulwer-Lytton’s aim was primarily to endow his fictional version of Eugene Aram with human fallibility and inner complexity in order to make him a memorable character in crime fiction. Consequently, the actual reasons for the controversy should be sought in the author’s aesthetic interest in exploring the criminal mind and turning it into a legitimate theme in fiction. Criticism thus rather arose as a result of Bulwer-Lytton’s subversion of narratological tenets which dictated criminals should remain secondary flat characters deprived of literary complexity and psychological depth. By means of not only focusing on a criminal as a hero, but also of producing an alluring portrayal of a murderer, Bulwer-Lytton thus defied established literary conventions already at the advent of crime fiction, which earned him enormous popularity, but also hostile critical response.

4. An author’s dilemma: popular acclaim and critical reception

The description of a scholar-criminal that is, for the most part, presented in Bulwer-Lytton’s *Eugene Aram* induces the reader to consider the hero, but also villain of the story, through a rather understanding and even considerate approach. With that purpose in mind, as has been shown, the narrator attempts to establish a friendly comradeship with his readers, sometimes even addressing them in an explicit way to secure some sort of complicity on their behalf. It is at the end of the novel that the narrator addresses the reader in these terms, admitting that, after everything they have shared, “then is there a tie between thee and me which cannot readily be broken” (378) and, by means of this explicit statement, the narrator already requests sympathy and indulgence from his readers to defend his novel and, particularly, his criminal hero. Owing to the narrator’s final address, it can be inferred that Bulwer-Lytton himself could

already foretell that his literary treatment of this criminal case and, particularly, that his favourable portrayal of a murderer may not meet an entirely approving critical reception among his contemporary critics. As Hollingsworth admits, Bulwer-Lytton mostly takes the side of the criminal and even seems unable to dissociate himself from him (1963: 92), as it is Eugene Aram who centres the attention of the whole novel and, despite his condition as a murderer, arises as its only hero.

As regards its readership, *Eugene Aram* gained immediate popularity and turned into a huge success to the extent that it became one of Bulwer-Lytton's most widely read novels. However, as its author had conjectured, if readers showed genuine enthusiasm, reviews of the novel showed that critics were of a rather diverse opinion. As Hollingsworth notices, periodicals such as *The Monthly Review* regarded the novel as one of Bulwer-Lytton's best books, *The Athenaeum* also underscored the genius this novel displayed, and *The Spectator* highlighted the idealised portrait that Bulwer-Lytton offered of Eugene Aram in which they saw nothing to blame (1963: 93). Conversely, though, these same reviews from *The Athenaeum* and *The Spectator*, along with others from *The Edinburgh Review* and *Tatler*, mostly deprecated Bulwer-Lytton's implausible portrait of the main character as a scholar as well as a criminal. As Claggett asserts, while the public's enduring fascination with Eugene Aram was based on his singularity as a scholar-criminal, critics found it difficult to accept that an exceptional intellectual could act so dishonestly (2016: 182) or that a cold-blooded criminal could also be a man of sensibility. In particular, William Manginn, from *Fraser's Magazine*, produced one of the harshest reviews of Bulwer-Lytton's novel, insofar as he denounced that *Eugene Aram* presented a murderer as a noble, and even attractive, character for the enjoyment of the masses. Even though the negative reviews upon the reception of *Eugene Aram* may at first sight appear to be grounded on moral and ethical reasons, judging them upon Manginn's statement that Bulwer-Lytton's sympathetic portrayal of a criminal comes hand in hand with "a modern, depraved, and corrupting taste" (Hollingsworth 1963: 93), it can be claimed that, as Manginn precisely asserts, his reasons have to do with taste and prevailing aesthetic views. Manginn's words thus unveil the literary prejudice that the reading public should not gain an intimate insight into the criminal's psychology, as this contributed to producing a humanised account of a character that was supposed to be categorised as despicable from a narratological point of view.

The criticism that his choice of featuring a criminal as the hero of his novel unleashed from the press urged Bulwer-Lytton not only to defend his right to write crime fiction, but also to justify himself for having resorted to sensation. As a popular writer of crime fiction, in a critical essay entitled "On Art in Fiction," published in 1838, Bulwer-Lytton gives evidence of being a self-conscious writer with a deep knowledge about his literary craft, while he also defends the legitimate inclusion of elements of sensation in his novels. In this critical essay, Bulwer-Lytton defends that "true art never disgusts" (339), and establishes the difference between 'terror' and 'horror,' stating that the former refers to a true tragic emotion, while the latter rather addresses our basest instincts, thus implying that he resorted to terror rather than horror to delineate the character of Eugene Aram. With a similar purpose in mind, following the publication of his crime

novel *Lucretia; or, The Children of the Night* (1846), which, as Sussex claims, would “earn Bulwer-Lytton the worst reviews of his career” (2008: 18), the author would also publish an extended critical essay under the title of *A Word to the Public: Containing Hints toward a Critical Essay upon the Artistic Principles and Ethical Designs of Fiction* in 1847, which also aimed at defending himself from accusations with respect to his fiction. In this later essay, although Bulwer-Lytton also sought to ground the defence of his novel alluding to an inherent moral purpose, insofar as his literary rendering of this criminal case displays how his shameful and guilty memories ultimately deprive Eugene Aram of any peace of mind, Bulwer-Lytton mostly justifies his taste for crime and sensation 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” (5). Upon focusing on the novels on behalf of which he had to bear strong criticism, in this essay, Bulwer-Lytton also defends himself from his choice to write a book such as *Eugene Aram* and outline the profile of an actual murderer. In praise of this novel in particular, Bulwer-Lytton justifies the choice of its theme claiming that the portrayal of an apparently blameless scholar that conceals a dark secret involving a murder, which is eventually brought to light, cannot be taken as a commonplace criminal case, but precisely, owing to its peculiarity, the author considered it to be particularly suitable for turning it into the subject of one of his novels. Given the appealing quality of this criminal case for the domain of fiction, in this critical essay, Bulwer-Lytton also concedes that other writers had also considered similar issues for literary purposes, as was the case with his mentor William Godwin and his much admired novel *Caleb Williams*, or even Walter Scott, to whom Bulwer-Lytton would eventually dedicate *Eugene Aram*. Consequently, in his aim to defend his crime fiction, Bulwer-Lytton contends in his essay *A Word to the Public* that “in dealing especially with 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” (31-2), thus establishing that what was claimed as an objectionable incursion in sensation was mainly aimed at earning himself a name for posterity as a writer.

According to Tyson, despite the heated defence that Bulwer-Lytton made of *Eugene Aram* in his critical essays defending his crime fiction, it was only two years later that he apparently submitted to the judgment of criticism and published a revised edition of the original novel (1983: 105). 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 an account of the major changes, as well as less important alterations, that he had introduced in the present edition of his novel. In the preface that he wrote to that purpose, the author concludes that, “I have convinced myself, that though an accomplice in the robbery of Clarke, he [Eugene Aram] was free both from the premeditated design and the actual deed of murder” (ix). It is in these terms that the author of the novel declares that the major change introduced in this new edition is that he has decided to acquit Aram of the murder of Daniel Clarke, so that the main character of his novel is no longer guilty as happened in the original criminal case and the first version of Bulwer-Lytton’s novel, but Aram is merely turned into Richard Houseman’s accomplice to robbery. As Tyson further argues, as a result of this major change in the plot, the author also felt obliged to introduce some minor

alterations, such as dropping the original emphasis on Eugene Aram's utilitarian justification for his crime, expunging passages that may be considered particularly irreligious or accentuating the character's remorse even further although the hero of his novel can no longer be considered a murderer (1983: 108). Critics, as is the case of Tyson (1983: 105) and, more recently, that of Claggett (2016: 171-2), claim that Bulwer-Lytton's decision to introduce such outstanding change in the plot of subsequent editions of his novel and exonerate his hero may respond to the writer's concession to harsh criticism. Nevertheless, Bulwer-Lytton's concern to present his hero in a more positive light from a critical perspective and, thus, gain the sympathy of reviewers in addition to that of his readership, may also respond to some more subtle reasons. After all, this would not be the last time that Bulwer-Lytton decided to introduce changes to literary texts which had already been published. As Sussex comments, Bulwer-Lytton would also rewrite his novel *Lucretia; or, The Children of the Night* (1846) in 1853 so that it had a happy ending (2008: 19), while, as is widely known, Bulwer-Lytton would also persuade his friend Charles Dickens to change the end of *Great Expectations* (Conrad Christensen 1976: 233). According to Sussex, Bulwer-Lytton's fondness of modifying some aspects of already published novels should be interpreted as "part of a continuing experiment with the controlled release of information" (2008: 15), which seemed particularly fitting to the genre of crime and detection, rather than succumbing to critical objections on moral grounds. It can thus be claimed that his concern about modifying some aspects of his novels were mostly aimed at preserving his public status as an author and defending crime as a suitable area to explore in fiction, with the view of securing himself a place as a writer for posterity. The author's need to defend his character not only in his critical essays, but also in subsequent editions of the novel, also unveils the writer's ultimate aesthetic aim to turn his sensation hero into a memorable character as well as his concern about public acclaim as a literary figure. The author's personal attachment to this scholar-criminal is also rooted in envisioning Eugene Aram as a cathartic portrayal of himself as a writer. Eugene Aram would remind Bulwer-Lytton that he had become a popular writer of sensation fiction, acclaimed by his readership, since, in a metaphorical way, like his criminal hero, Bulwer-Lytton had also ironically dared to indulge in crime as an author. However, as a Faustian hero, like the criminal character of his novel, Bulwer-Lytton was also thinking about his posthumous fame as a writer and defied the literary conventions which, even if they had earned him strong critical opposition in his lifetime, may ultimately contribute to earning him a name as a writer of crime fiction in forthcoming generations.

5. Conclusion

The publication of *Eugene Aram* involved a step forward in Bulwer-Lytton's career as a writer of crime fiction, insofar as he produced a psychological profile of a criminal, using an omniscient narrator who focalises his attention on the character of a murderer and presenting a sympathetic portrait of an individual, who, in spite of his condition as villain, also turns into the undisputable hero of the novel. Bulwer-Lytton's mostly romanticised profile of his criminal hero

responds to the author's intention to fictionalise the life of a murderer and gain the attention of his readership. Besides, though, the author's particular alluring portrayal of Eugene Aram was also grounded on the author's aim to write for posterity and, by means of endowing his character with complexity and psychological depth, turn him into a memorable character in spite of his criminal deeds. By means of the portrait that Bulwer-Lytton presents of this scholar-criminal, Eugene Aram arises as an eminently ambivalent literary hero as well as an extraordinary character in crime fiction. His fame as a literary criminal was sanctioned by the great popular acclaim that the novel obtained, which came hand in hand with the controversy that it also unleashed in critical reviews published in the press. Even though the harsh critical response to Bulwer-Lytton's portrayal of Eugene Aram appeared to be rooted in ethical reasons, it can be claimed that critical objections which referred to the impracticality of depicting a criminal as a sensitive man or an intellectual with homicidal tendencies mostly responded to Bulwer-Lytton's ground-breaking narratological devices which allowed readers to gain insight into Eugene Aram's thoughts and motivations, and even sympathise with this criminal hero and take pity on his tragic fate. Bulwer-Lytton's own critical positioning, as he defended the right to indulge in sensation, along with his literary ambition to provide an ambivalent portrait of a criminal in fiction, underscores his intention to attract instant popularity resorting to sensation, but also his will to gain enduring fame as a merited author of crime fiction. The critical controversy that Bulwer-Lytton had to face evokes the words of Edgar Allan Poe, who would review some of Bulwer-Lytton's novels, as the American writer declares "how full of prejudice are the usual animadversions against those *tales of effect*," ultimately stating that "the true critic will but demand that the design intended be accomplished, to the fullest extent, by means most advantageously applicable" (1970: 523). Bearing in mind Poe's words, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* should be judged by its author's intended design, which was that of elaborating an enduring portrait of the criminal as a hero that would outlast fading popularity, and attain posthumous fame for having defied established literary conventions and having accomplished his projected literary purpose.

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