

PREMATURELY AGED, LONG-LIVED:
THE EFFECTS OF AGEING AT A DIFFERENT PACE
IN EDGAR ALLAN POE AND EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON

Marta Miquel-Baldellou

ABSTRACT: The conceptualisations of the ageing process are culturally and temporally conditioned. Critics such as Teresa Mangum first and Karen Chase later have argued that the Victorians were particularly concerned about ageing and old age. In the nineteenth-century, the American writer Edgar Allan Poe and the Victorian English man of letters Edward Bulwer-Lytton, focusing on similar topics in their respective literary works, can be considered transatlantic doubles as well as indicative of national conceptualisations about their own processes of ageing. Being economically disinherited in his young adulthood, after growing accustomed to a reasonably well-off standard of living during his childhood, Edgar Allan Poe lived fast and underwent a quickened process of ageing. Conversely, Edward Bulwer-Lytton lived a reasonably long life and often behaved according to one's age, illustrating how to age well and highlighting the dignity that the process of ageing bestows upon the individual. Both writers experienced different turning points in their lives that conditioned their own way of perceiving ageing, which is in turn reflected in their literary works. This article aims at analysing both writers' differing approaches to ageing, as well as the different pace of life they adopted and its effects.

Keywords: ageing; place; time; precociousness; ageing prematurely.

1. Introduction

In terms of their respective biographies, being contemporaries, Edgar Allan Poe and Edward Bulwer-Lytton could be regarded as transatlantic double figures, respectively personifying two ends of the same spectrum. Even if coming from different backgrounds – Bulwer-Lytton, being an aristocrat and heir to the Lyttons lineage, and Poe being an orphan adopted by the Allans –, they found themselves undergoing important turning points in their lives that

particularly influenced the way they perceived the process of ageing. Despite their differing situations, representative of almost opposite social classes, the fact they both experienced an event which significantly changed their lives at a certain point, paves the ground to gain insight into the different way they approached life and ageing, looking into the ways they adapted to the new situation and how successful they were in their endeavours. These different views are deeply rooted in concrete personal experiences both authors underwent at some point in their lives, which set a precedent that influenced their differing approaches to ageing as well as the different pace of life they adopted and its effects. Likewise, these experiences and views about ageing often reverberated in their literary works as a reflection of their respective situations.

In the case of Edgar Allan 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 performers David Poe and Elizabeth Arnold. This important change endowed Poe with some social and economic aspirations that would remain for the most part of his life, striving to escape his original background and be accepted within his newly-acquired social milieu as a wealthy Southern gentleman in the United States of America. Moreover, being brought up in England and Scotland for an important part of his adolescence, Poe imbibed the importance attached to social hierarchy, which would eventually come to a close when he was virtually disinherited soon after John Allan remarried and had a family of his own.

Conversely, from birth, Edward Bulwer-Lytton was educated with a view to be raised to the peerage and inherit his mother's manor house, however, when his mother disapproved of his marriage to Rosina Wheeler and threatened to remove her allowance, Bulwer-Lytton felt compelled to write prolifically so as to earn a living on his own. Therefore, from being an orphan of humble origins, Edgar Allan Poe suddenly became the adopted son and expected successor of a wealthy merchant living in Europe, while Bulwer-Lytton, even if a future baronet and landowner, was forced to become a self-made man dependent on his own resources. In both cases, both authors' former situations were brought to a halt, requiring them to adapt to the new circumstances and underlining a differing process of maturation that responded to their respective situations.

Likewise, both authors' differing approaches towards life and ageing as a result of their circumstances can be tackled in their literary works through either, firstly, instances of premature ageing or precociousness; secondly, positive or negative views of ageing and old age, and thirdly, the fear of either earliness or lateness which ultimately conditioned the fact their lives followed a different pace.

2. The Victorians and the Biographical Approach

Due to the Utilitarian emphasis on individual self-interest, as well as the middle-class confidence in personal effort and initiative so as to attain success, individualism often shaped the ways in which Victorians interpreted their place in the universe (Moran 2006, 34). Because of the importance attached to individualism, guidebooks that offered advice on self-development and volumes describing exemplary lives acquired significant popularity in Victorian times. As a case in point, Samuel Smiles' manual *Self-Help* (1859) provided a series of biographical sketches of reputed Victorians so as to promote entrepreneurship and the ethics of the self-made man. Among all the sketches in Smiles' book, there was a chapter particularly devoted to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, which still proves the contemporaneous admiration for the baronet owing to his strenuous work as both a politician and a prolific novelist.

This curiosity for the accounts of other lives gave way to an unprecedented fascination with biography and autobiographical writing in the Victorian period, as is the case with Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), or John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873). This interest in life stories also found its counterpart in the Victorian preoccupation about the process by which an individual struggled to maturity, which in turn led to an increasing interest in the process of ageing and the proliferation of *bildungsroman* narratives in the domain of fiction.

The Victorian appeal to biographical writing and ageing seems particularly interesting from the perspective of contemporary biographical theory. Owing to the advent of postmodernism, grand narratives, dominant ideologies and social theories alike are often called into question (Roberts 2002, 4), and conversely, narratives and life stories are given the same prominence as any apparently authoritative accounts as it is claimed everything can be subjected to scrutiny, and thus, ultimately subverted. Postmodern approaches have given way to the need of making use of a variety of texts as an attempt to gain insight into some sort of truth. In this sense, fiction can also be considered as a valid entry into the study of an author's life, using his own works as a way to gain insight into his life experience and his process of maturation, together with any biographical or autobiographical documents. In this sense, according to Wilfred L. Guerin, the historical-biographical approach to literature "sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of the author's life and times" (1999, 22), thus claiming that biographical theory is based on the premise that a person's life necessarily influences his or her work, and a biographical analysis of an author's works necessarily sheds light on his or her life, thoughts and evolution as an individual.

Given the current emphasis on biographical studies and the Victorian interest in biographical perspectives, the historical-biographical literary

approach is particularly effective to provide current new entries into the works of canonical writers as well as to rediscover authors whose works have not been studied profusely enough yet. Nineteenth-century writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, as an arguably canonical writer, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, as a reputed Victorian whose fame ultimately fell into oblivion, are particularly apt to be studied from the discipline of biographical studies, precisely because of the significant corpus of biographical texts that have been produced together with their literary works such as biographies, letters and personal papers. With regard to Poe, soon after his demise, many scholarly accounts of his life came to light, such as the volumes produced by John Ingram, Arthur Hobson Quinn, Jeffrey Meyers, Kenneth Silverman, or Peter Ackroyd, to name just a few. Likewise, during his lifetime, Edward Bulwer-Lytton started writing an autobiography, and after his demise, his son Robert and his grandson Victor took over the task that his father and grandfather, respectively, had begun but could not finish, thus producing impressively thorough biographies of Edward Bulwer-Lytton that have endured up to now.

3. The Discourse of Ageing and the Perception of Time

In her seminal volume entitled *The Long Life*, Helen Small claims that one observable change that ageing brings is not biological but psychological (2007, 272). It is argued that, as the individual approaches old age, it becomes more usual to think about the limited time available. Nonetheless, Helen Small also claims there exists what she calls a 'double-think', since, as they grow older, some individuals spend more time thinking about their ageing process, whereas others spend an important period of time trying not to think about ageing and everything it involves.

Expanding on Helen Small's reflections, it can also be argued that the way of understanding ageing is conditioned culturally, since, as Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues, we are actually aged by culture. In this respect, the Victorian period seems to be a significantly important era from the perspective of ageing studies, since, according to Teresa Mangum (2005), there was a greater concern about the process of ageing in Victorian England. Likewise, Karen Chase (2009) has also thoroughly explored how the discourse of ageing began to gain unprecedented attention in Victorian cultural manifestations, especially in literature. Conversely, according to historian David Hackett Fischer (1978), in the United States of America, due to their differing cultural and political situation, the nineteenth-century could be defined as a period of gerontophobia. In this sense, many literary manifestations at the time envisioned old age as a metaphor for the old order that had to be left behind so as to become a nation of their own.

The conceptualisations of ageing are thus deeply influenced by cultural ideologies that depend on nation and place. However, at this stage, it seems pertinent to go back to Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope' (1981), by means

of which he referred to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships whereby space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, and thus, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one and are utterly interdependent. From this follows that, if space and culture determine the ageing process, the conceptualisations of time equally determine the way ageing is approached as space and time are mutually dependent.

Being contemporaries and citizens of different nations, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Edgar Allan Poe approached ageing from a different perspective. Drawing on Helen Small's concept of the 'double-think', Bulwer-Lytton was well aware of his ageing process and the responsibilities he had to acquire as heir to the Lyttons' lineage. Conversely, Edgar Allan Poe, having experienced the death of many of his beloved relatives and friends during all his life, he seemed to grow detached from any reflection on his own process of ageing, even though tragic circumstances increased his sense of gloom and his feeling of growing prematurely aged. Bulwer-Lytton often reflected on the passage of time and the apparent sense of prolongation that the continuation of his lineage endowed him with, whereas Poe was well-aware that, deprived of his foster father's protection and remaining childless, he spent most of his life running out of time, trying to avoid his inevitable dissolution which would eventually cut his life too short.

4. Bulwer-Lytton's State of Precociousness and Poe's Fear of Premature Ageing

Bulwer-Lytton's characters often display precociousness and maturity despite their youth, while in Poe's tales, an important number of characters undergo a process of premature ageing. According to James Campbell, some of Bulwer-Lytton's literary works can be described as the *Bildungsroman* in the sense that they follow a formula often pertaining to the novel of initiation (1986, 131). Some of his most highly acclaimed novels such as *Pelham* (1828), *Paul Clifford* (1830) and *The Caxtons* (1849) portray young boys coming of age that are required to grow up fast due to tragic and demanding circumstances, thus acquiring an acute sense of precociousness and maturation despite their young age. Conversely, Poe's tales often feature characters that undergo a fast process of ageing, thus presenting traits that underline the fact they have aged prematurely. As a case in point, some of Poe's most popular tales, such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), portray characters such as Roderick Usher, who looks significantly older than his childhood companion despite the fact they are the same age. The inclusion of this disparate sort of characters in both authors' respective literary works is also deeply rooted in the circumstances they both lived, which conditioned the way they approached the process of ageing.

Fairly early in his youth, Bulwer-Lytton became aware he would inherit his mother's aristocratic title together with her stately home, Knebworth House, thus acquiring a great sense of responsibility as legitimate successor

of the Lytton family. As his son Robert Lytton describes in his biography, since Edward Bulwer-Lytton's elder brothers William and Henry had been assigned their father's manor house and their grandmother's fortune respectively, their mother, Elizabeth Barbara, decided to choose Edward, the youngest son, as her own representative and legitimate heir at a very young age, when he was scarcely conscious of his own existence. This realisation would soon turn young Edward into a precocious and mature child, fully aware that his education was mostly aimed at training him to accept his duties as a future baronet and heir to his lineage. Consequently, he soon gained insight into the certainty his fate had been determined soon after his birth, so that his life became for the most part a period of waiting until his duty would eventually be accomplished. Bulwer-Lytton was thus raised fully aware of the future that was awaiting him, being inculcated to live with his older days in mind despite his blatant youth.

Consequently, Bulwer-Lytton often envisioned young characters that, as a result of their personal circumstances, became precocious and prematurely grown-up, feeling compelled to take responsibility for their own existence at a very young age. As a case in point, Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Night and Morning* (1841) revolves around young Phillip Beaufort, who struggles to survive in a materialistic society that places great importance on birth, money, and family connections. While his younger brother Sidney is adopted, and is granted financial security as well as a formal education, Phillip soon becomes an adult as a result of hardship and adversity, earning his living and ultimately recovering the legal possession of his family's manor house Fernside. Phillip's premature adulthood and great sense of responsibility as opposed to his brother is thus depicted:

There was a strong contrast in the two boys. The elder, who was about fifteen, seemed older than he was, not only from his height, but from the darkness of his complexion, and a certain proud, nay imperious, expression upon features that, without having the soft and fluent graces of childhood, were yet regular and striking. (14)

Phillip Beaufort is required to be precocious and acquire responsibilities in spite of his youth. Deprived of a family, growing up alone and taking care of his younger brother, he is required to behave wisely and age fast, thus attaining maturity before he is actually due. Similarly, in his gothic novel *Lucretia* (1846), Bulwer-Lytton also reflected on the negative effects of denying a female adolescent the right to behave according to her age. Detached from any female companion of the same age, Lucretia is given the education bestowed upon male heirs at the time and is brought up in a strict and stern manner despite her youth. In this respect, she is deprived of her femininity and childish ways, behaving in a way that seems quite at odds with her age:

As she grew older, she became more reserved and thoughtful. Seeing but few children of her own age, and mixing intimately with none, her mind was debarred from the usual objects which distract the vivacity, the restless and wondrous observation, of childhood. [...] It has a great influence upon a child, whether for good or for evil, to mix early and habitually with those grown up, - for good to the mere intellect always; the evil depends upon the character and discretion of those the child sees and hears. (41)

Her early upbringing into the world of adults and the fact of being deprived of her childhood result in disgrace as Lucretia becomes a wicked heiress, mostly interested in laying hands on her uncle's manor and legacy and finding her own stranded son.

Bulwer-Lytton is thus critical of children behaving like adults, even if the result he presents differs in his novels, thus being rather ambivalent. In his novel *Night and Morning*, Phillip Beaufort is rewarded, even though his younger brother grows detached from him and resents the miserable and humble existence he had when he lived with his elder brother. Likewise, in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Lucretia*, the heroine is highly educated, subverting the Victorian standards of gender that limited women's upbringing to domesticity and submissiveness. However, it is implied that, because Lucretia grows up detached from any female companion and is educated as an heiress, she eventually becomes a murderess due to her unlimited ambition and her mannish manners, having been previously required to come of age and leave her childhood behind before due time.

If Bulwer-Lytton's characters are required to grow up before they are due, Poe's characters often undergo premature ageing as a reflection of the author's personal circumstances at the time. Edgar Allan Poe spent most of his childhood and youth in Richmond, Virginia, and a significant period of his adolescence in England and in Scotland. Having received a European education and being raised as a Southern gentleman in his foster father's manor house, Moldavia, Poe inevitably grew accustomed to a comfortable standard of living. This privileged background led Poe to acquire certain social and economic aspirations that would persist in his adulthood, to the extent of even taking for granted that he would someday be appointed legitimate heir of the Allans, as Frances and John Allan had no children of their own.

Nonetheless, Edgar Allan Poe's hopes began to shatter when, after the death of his foster mother Frances, John Allan married again and had three legitimate sons. In one of the most recent biographies written about Edgar Allan Poe, Peter Ackroyd admits that John Allan's prospects of having legitimate children in addition to the gossip about Poe's dissolute habits that often reached Allan contributed to raising Allan's suspicions about the child he had decided to protect and adopt with his late wife Frances years before (2008, 41). As a result of this, upon his foster father's death, when Poe was

scarcely twenty-five years of age, he realised his aspirations to become John Allan's successor finally came to no avail, as he was disinherited and excluded from John Allan's will. This realisation involved a significant turning point in Edgar Allan Poe's life, which deeply conditioned his own process of ageing. At the age of twenty-five, he felt compelled to adjust the way of life he had adopted during his youth and aspired to maintain ever after. His effort to become a self-made man, only dependent on his own resources for the first time and trying to make himself a name, became a heavy burden to bear, which ultimately unleashed a relentless process of premature ageing.

In sharp contrast with Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who envisioned his responsibilities as heir to the Lytton lineage as a way to stretch the limits of his life through time, Poe's future prospects appeared significantly bleaker, as a sign of doom and eventual disappearance. Edgar Allan Poe had been rejected as John Allan's heir, and after his marriage to Virginia and her fragile condition, they never had children, stating, as it were, in clear resemblance with Roderick and Madeline Usher in his seminal tale, that they were the last members of their race. This sense of inevitable gloom is clearly reflected in many of Edgar Allan Poe's tales as he often portrayed characters undergoing a sudden process of ageing, moving from adulthood to old age with almost a sigh. As a classic example, the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher" feels astonished when he sets eyes on Roderick Usher and his significantly aged appearance, portraying a paradigmatic character representing premature ageing, thus confessing:

We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. 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. (2004, 202)

This abrupt and unexpected change in such a brief period of time, thus showing a premature process of ageing, is also evocative of a meaningful episode in Poe's tale "The Strange Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar", as the physician observes his patient carefully, aware of his inevitable and approaching disappearance. At some point, the doctor's attention is significantly drawn to the sharp contrast between the colour of Valdemar's whiskers and that of his hair, thus underlining a relentless transitional stage of ageing, which also established a difference between the patient's weak condition and his will, which under the doctor's mesmeric powers, seems to persist in time, despite Valdemar's dying state:

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. His temperament was markedly nervous, and rendered him a good subject for mesmeric experiment. (2004:408)

As is the case with Roderick Usher, Valdemar also presents features that connote he has undergone a premature process of decay, while the physician holds control over his patient's will, obliging him to hold on to life despite the fact his body has already died. The sharp separation between will and body is also often brought about through the process of ageing, as the spirit seems to remain young, while the body grows weaker.

Likewise, in some of his tales, Edgar Allan Poe also depicts instances of women's process of premature ageing. His well-known tale "The Oval Portrait" presents an illustrative metaphor whereby the artist's obsession to capture his wife's youth on his canvas gradually undermines her life, so that the portrait is endowed with youth and immortality while his wife perishes soon after the portrait has been finished, noticing that "the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him" (2004:298), thus showing art easily defeats the temporary and fleeting nature of life, while the artistic creation is beyond the decaying effects of time.

Similarly, some of Poe's tales also portray sudden physical changes that the ageing process usually involves. These alterations often denote the individuals' premature course of ageing, which is further emphasised by means of the viewer's mistaken perception. In this respect, in Poe's grotesque piece entitled "The Spectacles", a conceited young man, Simpson, falls in love with an attractive young woman, Eugénie Lalande, as they meet at the opera. As soon as they get engaged, Eugénie Lalande accepts to marry Simpson on the condition he agrees to wear spectacles - glasses - to cure him of his short-sightedness. However, once Simpson puts on his spectacles, he suddenly realises he has married a toothless lady of eighty-two years of age, whom he discovers to be his great-great-grandmother, playing tricks on him to reprimand him for his overstated vanity. Having gained insight into the real condition of his beloved bride, Simpson regards it as a source of the abject, thus depicting the transcendental moment when he becomes aware of his bride's actual age:

What, in the name of every thing hideous, did this mean? Could I believe my eyes? - *could* I? - that was the question. Was that - was that - was that *rouge*? And were those - and were those - were those *wrinkles*, upon the visage of Eugénie Lalande? And oh! Jupiter, and every one of the gods and goddesses, little and big! - what - what - what - *what* had become of her teeth? I dashed the spectacles violently to the ground, and, leaping to my feet, stood erect in the middle of the floor, confronting Mrs. Simpson, with my arms set a-kimbo, and grinning and foaming, but, at the same time, utterly speechless with terror and rage. (1982, 703)

In Poe's tales, ageing is often envisioned as an unexpected and premature process, which becomes a pervasive source of fear and despair. The premature process of ageing some characters in Poe's tales undergo becomes a metaphor

of decay and insufferable gloom anticipating the individual's irremediable disappearance.

5. Alluring and Embittered Approaches Towards the Ageing Process

In addition to the importance Bulwer-Lytton and Poe placed on precociousness and premature ageing respectively, in most of his literary works Bulwer-Lytton seemed to acquire a more positive approach towards ageing in relation to Poe. Again, these different tendencies seem to be the result of their personal circumstances.

In the case of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the fact of living most of the time ahead of his present and getting ready to fulfil his fate as a successor endowed him with a particular approach towards the passage of time and the course of ageing. Living in Knebworth House as a child, he gained insight into his family's ancestry and all the generations that would still reside there for many centuries to come. This gave him a sense of permanence and continuation, regarding his elders with reverence and even awe, finding in his maternal grandfather, the great scholar Richard Warburton Lytton, a model of experience to emulate in his youth. Likewise, being raised in virtual isolation and deprived of the company of other children, Edward Bulwer-Lytton was for the most part surrounded by people far above his age for most of his childhood and adolescence; a situation that endowed him with a sense of precocious maturity, feeling attracted towards his grandfather's example and becoming interested in great and highbrow works of literature, philosophy, and even metaphysics.

Consequently, in contrast with Edgar Allan Poe, Bulwer-Lytton often envisioned ageing as a productive, active and pleasant stage in life, where most objectives would ultimately be accomplished and individuals could fulfil the wishes and expectations they had given thought to in the course of their lives. In this sense, in his domestic novel *The Caxtons*, it is precisely in his old age that Austin Caxton, decides to write what becomes to be known as his Great Book, in capital letters, which he intends to be the result of a lifetime of strenuous effort and profound study of the great philosophers. As he sits next to his granddaughters, Austin Caxton urges himself to finish his Great Book in his old age as follows:

Years have passed, and two fair daughters play at the knees of Blanche, or creep round the footstool of Austin, waiting patiently for the expected kiss when he looks up from the Great Book, now drawing fast to its close. (489)

Likewise, in one of Bulwer-Lytton's later novels, *A Strange Story*, which he wrote when he was about to turn sixty years of age, the young physician Allen Fenwick shows his gratefulness to his ageing mentor Doctor Faber, who decides to retire from medicine with the purpose to remain continuously active and even start a tour across Europe, thus stating

Dr. Faber retired at the end of the two years agreed upon. He went abroad; and being, though advanced in years, of a frame still robust, and habits of mind still inquiring and eager, he commenced a lengthened course of foreign travel, during which our correspondence, at first frequent, gradually languished, and finally died away. (13)

Thus, for the most part, in his novels Edward Bulwer-Lytton envisioned old age as an eminently productive stage in life rather than the beginning of an individual's decline, as was customary in many literary works depicting the aged at the time. In addition to his literary works, Bulwer-Lytton also displayed a remarkably positive attitude towards ageing in his collection of philosophical essays entitled *Caxtoniana*, which he published in the year 1864, when he was already in his sixties. Particularly, in his essay "On the Increased Attention to Outward Nature in the Decline of Life", he defends ageing increases the capacity for attention and reflection. In this respect, Bulwer-Lytton argues that

[y]ou will find men who, in youth and middle age, seeming scarcely to notice the most striking features of some unfamiliar landscape, become minutely observant of the rural scenery around them when the eye has grown dim and the step feeble. (13)

Likewise, Bulwer-Lytton seems to endow ageing with a particular transcendence and a significantly spiritual quality, as if the aged individual was endowed with a more acute sensibility as they moved closer to the Creator, as he points out that

[w]hen that period of action approaches towards its close, the soul [...] gradually relaxes its hold of former objects, and, insensibly perhaps to itself, is attracted nearer toward the divine source of all being. (16)

With regard to Poe, unable to pursue the life of privilege he had so far enjoyed, when he was twenty-five he was dispossessed of the kind of future he had envisioned in his childhood and youth. This inevitably involved a permanent sense of stagnation, a latent process of premature ageing, as well as the fear of being unable to make progress in life; a feeling Poe often regarded as 'the imp of the perverse', making reference to a haunting feeling of doom which anticipated the end was inevitably close at hand and that any possibility of prosperity seemed out of the question.

A bleak and dreary view towards ageing and old age is also often revealed in some of Poe's tales, as they evoke an atmosphere of insurmountable gloom and decay that inevitably condemns the individual to extinction. In Poe's seminal tale, "The Fall of the House of Usher", Roderick Usher confesses that,

together with his twin sister Madeline, they are “the last of the ancient race of the Ushers” (204), thus revealing his awareness of the “inevitable approaching dissolution” (204) awaiting both siblings. The Ushers are presented as the last members of a race, and as such, they are doomed to disappear, like Edgar Allan Poe and his wife Virginia, being cousins and childless, were the last representatives of their lineage.

In addition to the sense of insufferable gloom that anticipates approaching extinction, in some cases, ageing is also described through dependence and weakness. As a case in point, in Poe’s tale “The Tell-Tale Heart”, despite the mutual relation of dependence the narrator and the old man he takes care of seem to have, the old man’s life literally remains in the young narrator’s hands as he approaches him in the middle of the night to take his life. Even though the young narrator insists on the fact he is not interested in the old man’s wealth, he is constantly haunted by the old man’s Evil Eye, as he is permanently invigilating upon his young carer while the latter is also watching over the old man, especially at night, when he appears weaker and more fragile. Instances of illness and physical decay often recur in Poe’s tales, from Madeline’s relentless catalepsy and Roderick Usher’s acuteness of the senses to Valdemar’s approaching end and Ligeia’s inevitable dissolution despite her blatant will to hold on to life.

Nonetheless, “The Man That Was Used Up” is probably one of the best examples of physical decay as Poe’s tale sarcastically portrays how the narrator believes General John A.B.C. Smith to be one of the most remarkable men of his age due to his impressive achievements in the battlefield but also due to his impressive build and strength. However, when the narrator decides to visit the general’s home he realises that the general’s valet, Pompey, has to assemble his master piece by piece, amalgamating legs, arms, shoulders and chest to give shape to the general’s body as everybody knows him. The narrator discovers the general’s secret lying behind appearances, and thus realises how easily people can be fooled if they merely rely on first impressions and disregard the rest. General Smith’s regeneration and rejuvenation through the use of artifice and make-up also recalls Eugénie Lalande’s youthful appearance through Simpson’s myopic vision, mistaking her for a young girl of his age.

Likewise, in Poe’s tales, old age is also associated with the burden of memories that inevitably spring to mind despite the passage of time. In Poe’s tale “The Cask of Amontillado”, Montresor methodically describes a murder he committed long ago, giving extraordinary details about his deed. However, Montresor’s account of the facts gains an entirely new perspective when, at the end of his confession, he admits that “for the half of a century no mortal has disturbed” the bones of poor Fortunato (2004:421). The very last words Montresor utters in the course of his confession unveil that, despite the passage of time and his age, he still feels the need to give voice to his deed, mostly because his guilt condemns him to remember forever.

Thus, Roderick Usher, the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart”, General A.B.C. Smith and Montresor are portrayed as aged individuals tormented by illness, dependence, fear, physical decay, as well as unforgettable memories from a past they are unable to leave behind, which remain in contrast with experienced individuals in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels that, as a result of a lifetime, have compiled knowledge and understanding to face and approach ageing as one of the most productive stages in their lives.

6. Bulwer-Lytton’s Worries About Being too Early and Poe’s Anxiety for Being Too Late

Likewise, both authors’ literary works seem to display a different pace of life, with characters showing some fear of earliness or precociousness in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels, and narrators displaying some fear of lateness in Poe’s tales. These tendencies again seem to be the result of personal situations both authors respectively underwent. In Bulwer-Lytton’s case, his mother’s decision to choose him as successor seemed to disrupt what, in her husband’s view, was the normal course of legacy and inheritance as her son Edward was granted this privilege when he was the youngest of three brothers, thus disregarding the rules of primogeniture. According to Bulwer-Lytton himself, this event propelled his father’s resentment towards him, which led Bulwer-Lytton to feel a haunting sense of guilt when he grew older, especially as General Bulwer died soon after Edward was proclaimed heir against his father’s will. Experiencing the death of his father at such a young age entailed that Bulwer-Lytton soon became aware of his role as heir of the Lytton family, ultimately learning his life span would become an awaiting period to inherit his rights and responsibilities as baronet when he was in his late fifties, thus mostly living his life with his sights set on his maturity; a stage perceived as the prime of his life, when his predetermined fate would be ultimately accomplished.

As a result of the experience he had to bear when he was a child, being appointed successor at a very early age, some characters in Bulwer-Lytton’s novels often suffer difficulties and are caught in troublesome situations due to their anticipation and earliness, showing some degree of fear at being too early. In this sense, in one of his best Newgate novels entitled *Eugene Aram*, a young and bright scholar undergoing arduous economic constraints decides to murder an acquaintance, Daniel Clarke, so as to rob him of the valuables he had also previously stolen. However, as luck would have it, only a few days later, Eugene Aram is informed he has been appointed beneficiary of a distant relative, thus realising he needn’t have committed murder so as to solve his financial difficulties. In this respect, when Eugene Aram is about to be sentenced to death when his deeds are brought to light, he admits

Mark what poor strugglers we are in the eternal web of destiny! Three days after that deed, a relation who neglected me in life died, and left me wealth! – wealth at

last to me! – Wealth, greater than that for which I had...! The news fell on me like a thunderbolt. 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! (361)

Eugene Aram thus shows how harshly he is punished as a result of his anticipation. Wishing to get above himself and become rich so as to devote his whole life to the pursuit of knowledge, he is reprimanded for his Faustian aspirations as well as for daring to take the reins of his own existence, murdering so as to rob an individual of his wealth and thus be able to take possession of the money that otherwise it would have taken him years to earn.

Similarly, in his earlier crime novel entitled *Paul Clifford*, after having been wrongly accused of a crime he has not committed, Paul decides to join a gang of thieves. One night, Paul and his accomplice Long Ned plan to rob an aged man and his daughter, stealing the aged man's expensive watch. This theft ultimately acquires significant connotations in the course of the novel as the victim of this theft is found to be Judge William Brandon, who, in addition to being about to sentence Paul to death in court later on in the novel, he is also unveiled to be Paul's biological father. In the light of this information, Paul's theft of his father's watch acquires unexpected significance. Stealing his father's watch literally implies stealing his time, and being William Brandon's son, Paul is thus merely taking hold of the property one day will become his own as part of his inheritance, being his father's actual successor. In this case, Paul's real crime in the end consists in laying hands over his father's property before due time, anticipating his father's death and thus claiming what will be his own simply too early, before his father's demise. Likewise, these fictional passages also seem to reflect Bulwer-Lytton's own sense of guilt for having been chosen heir to the Lyttons' lineage to the detriment of his own elder brothers, despite being the youngest sibling. Well aware of the fact his father resented his wife's choice to appoint her youngest son as her heir, thus disregarding the rules of primogeniture, Bulwer-Lytton grew up with this responsibility and the blurring memories of his father's resentment especially after his premature death, when Edward was merely in his early childhood.

If characters are often punished as a result of their anticipation in Bulwer-Lytton's novels, Poe's tales often reveal an acute fear of lateness. Poe's need to reconstruct his past of privilege at the time ultimately unveiled his fear of being too late to start anew, having spent the first half of his life envisioning an alluring future and having assumed very different expectations of what his life should be like at that stage. Thus, even though his relation with his foster father had always remained intricate, all of a sudden Poe realised the life he had projected under his shadow was no longer feasible, and consequently, he increasingly felt he was running out of time to attempt to reconstruct his former privileged position.

As a result of his personal circumstances, Edgar Allan Poe felt compelled to lead a hectic life, moving across the country to find a job as editor and make a living to support his family. His restlessness and increasing fatigue are frequently mentioned in his letters addressed to his aunt and mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, in the course of his numerous trips. This overstressed fast rhythm revealed Poe's fear of being late and age too soon. As a case in point, when Rufus Wilmot Griswold asked Edgar Allan Poe to provide him with a biographical sketch to be published in *The Poets and Poetry of America*, Poe was found to lie about his age, stating he was two years younger than he actually was. His lies about his age would persist for some time as he later on addressed Rufus Griswold another letter stating he was four years younger than he actually was. This proves Edgar Allan Poe felt concerned about his age. Likewise, as a dramatic and telling metaphor in his fiction, Poe would often resort to premature burials as nightmarish and terrifying experiences which ultimately involved being forced to vanish from existence before due course. This shocking experience ultimately involved fear of being too late, underlining the feeling of running out of time and feeling out of breath. In this respect, in his seminal tale "The Premature Burial", the narrator thus confesses:

To be buried alive, is, beyond question, the most terrific of these extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality. That it has frequently, very frequently, so fallen, will scarcely be denied by those who think. The boundaries which divide Life from Death, are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and the other begins! (2004, 357)

The contradictory nature of this oxymoron, of being taken as dead while being still alive, and vice versa, of being taken as still living while being already dead, is frequently explored in many of Poe's tales, thus subverting and disrupting any clear statement based on physical appearance and the individual's psychological or emotional state. However, apart from being a gothic motif that repeatedly recurs in some of Poe's tales, it also becomes a metaphor for the anguishing feeling of vanishing before due time and thus being late to accomplish what has been intended. Likewise, Edgar Allan Poe's metaphor symbolising the fact of running out of time and meeting death before due course is also tackled through exploring the nature of transient states such as catalepsy befalling characters such as the consumptive and emaciated Madeline in "The Fall of the House of Usher" or metempsychosis through the transformation from mother to daughter and vice versa in "Morella".

Similarly, the inevitable passage of time that eventually brings everything to a closure is also explored in Poe's tale "The Pit and the Pendulum", as the sharp blade of the pendulum symbolises the inexorable scythe of time approaching its victim to meet his end. The feeling of being late as well as of

running out of time also recurs in many of Poe's writings, even in the personal letters he wrote in the last years of his life. As a case in point, in his letters addressed to Sarah Helen Whitman during the last two years in his life, he gave account of his hectic life often making use of sentences such as "I hasten to reply" (December 16, 1848) or "I wrote you yesterday, sweet Helen, but, through fear of being too late for the mail" (November 26, 1848). Thus, Poe's letters at the time reflect his fear of being too late and having to rush to be on time. Dying when he was merely forty, his activity was especially hectic during the last year of his life, as he constantly travelled around to make ends meet. After his wife Virginia's demise, his incapacity to be alone also urged him to become acquainted with many ladies, among them, Annie Richmond and Sarah Helen Whitman, and especially, Sarah Elmira Royster, to whom he had already been engaged in his youth.

His constant journeys, his ongoing relationships with women and his need to move on, as he unfolds in his letters at the time, underline Poe's arduous activity during the last years of his life, thus anticipating the end was close at hand. As Peter Ackroyd argues in one of Poe's most recent biographies, Poe's life was in fact cut short. He was required to live fast, especially when his expectations of becoming John Allan's heir came to no end and he had to start a life of his own, when he was already in his twenties. Having been educated in the English metropolis, and taking into consideration the United States of America had become independent from England merely thirty years before his birth, Poe, also being a Southerner, seemed to cling to a past old order that was doomed to disappear soon. In a way, it can be argued he aged prematurely in a country that struggled to leave its past behind so as to find its own identity as a young and unique nation.

7. Conclusions

All things considered, coming from both ends of the social spectrum but undergoing significant turning points in their lives and reflecting on analogous themes in their literary works, Edgar Allan Poe and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, as transatlantic double figures, illustrate different ways of approaching the process of ageing. As a result of his European upbringing and his sudden rejection on the part of his foster family, Edgar Allan Poe felt compelled to live fast, moving continuously around the country and ageing prematurely as a result of an insufferable sense of gloom. In a way, Poe was caught unprepared, being required to make the transition between an old order he had imbibed and a new political, social and economic situation that was about to start. In this respect, Poe illustrated a sense of planned obsolescence which the advent of capitalism in the United States at the time was beginning to proclaim, rejecting the old order and worshipping the ethics of novelty and youth, leaving their European roots behind so as to forge an identity of their own.

Conversely, since birth, Edward Bulwer-Lytton was raised being aware of the duties he would have to fulfil in due time as successor of his family lineage. Knowing that his fate will only be accomplished late in life, he envisioned ageing as an enriching stage in life, whereby individuals could profit from experience and enjoy a quieter and introspective period that seemed out of place in youth. In a way, Bulwer-Lytton represented the Victorian ethics which held the grandeur of history and the British Empire in high esteem, holding on to a magnificent period that was also inevitably coming to an end.

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