

## Reception of the English criminal novel in Russia of the 19-th century by the example of Dostoevsky's crime and punishment

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**Abstract.** The article deals with the reception of English social-criminal novel in Russia that had special context and conditions, its stages and transformations at different levels of the Russian literature. A key moment was the beginning of the 1860s when E. Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* (1832) was first translated. The translation of this novel coincided with Dostoyevsky's work on the novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866), in which we see the parallels to *Eugene Aram*. Those relations are obvious both at the level of plot and narration as well as in the images of the main heroes. Against the background of the presented comparison the artistic peculiarities of each writer are seen clearer, there appears a possibility to consider their writings from the new points of view.

[Aizikova I.A., Matveenko I.A. **Reception of the English criminal novel in Russia of the 19-th century by the example of Dostoevsky's crime and punishment.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(11s):573-578] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 131

**Keywords:** Reception, Social-Criminal Novel, Genre, Crime Fiction, Genre Transformation, Translation, Newgate Novel, Sensation Novel, F. Dostoevsky, E. Bulwer-Lytton.

### Introduction

The continued strong interest of contemporary literary criticism in genre and its classification shows the urgent demand for investigation of the powerful influence of early nineteenth-century English crime fiction on Russian literature in terms of the basic concepts developed by M. M. Bakhtin [1], A. Fowler [2], D. Rain [3], and others. These foundational scholars discussed the philosophic-aesthetic nature of genre phenomena, the boundaries of various genres and their significance. In particular, they call for studying genre using a complex approach that includes detailed historical-literary reconstruction of different historical periods and typological investigation revealing general regularities and succession in literary genre development.

The study of the crime fiction and its reception in Russian literature is of special significance from the point of view of reconstructing the shifting system of genres unfolding in Russian literary works in the 1840-1890's. A typology of crime fiction as well as a determination of common features and distinctions permits us to discern a certain distinct succession in the genre co-evolution in two national literatures – Russian and English. Moreover, reconstructing the social-criminal novel's reception in Russian literature helps retroactively to specify the characteristics of the English genre, highlighting its developments of English literature.

The social-criminal novel – including especially its subgenres called the Newgate and sensation novels – is an integrated, historically defined genre system generated in the transition from

early nineteenth-century Romantic philosophy, aesthetics and poetics to later Realist ones. It is this transition that determines the peculiarities of characters, the sets of motifs, and narrative techniques of the English social-criminal novel that then influenced the Russian novel both as an integrated form and as separate elements of its aesthetics and poetics. Basically, the kind of crime story, whether written in English or Russian, at issue here is summarily defined by A. E. Murch, as a tale whose “typical subject ... arouse[s] [the reader's] sympathetic interest in the entertaining rascal, either out of admiration for his adroitness or because some past injustice drove him into dishonest practices” [4]. Unlike the detective fiction that originates in the 1840s, these crime stories take as their focus the criminal's life and point of view.

Stories of criminals are of course as old as human civilization and they present a vast literary resource. In the Middle Ages picaresque novels became very popular due to the specific form of narration: episodic adventures connected by the figure of a wandering trickster. In England of the eighteenth century the development of crime fiction was deeply connected to volume publications of *The Newgate Calendar*, which, according to H. Worthington, extend the “material ... where crime fiction has its origins [in] the broadsides and periodical stories [that] vary and develop the patterns ... cheap, single sheets of paper printed on one side only and available to a wide and socially disparate audience” [5].

Looking at the elements of the English social-criminal novel we may distinguish three main

branches of narrative structure: in the center of the crime novel there is usually a description of crime (the image of criminal, motifs of committing crime), sometimes an investigation (the theme of detective who penetrates into the logic of crime, endeavors to understand the reasons of crime), and finally an account of the punishment (the theme of the judge both inner and outer, social justice and his repentance). According to K. Hollingsworth's classification of the Newgate novel variations in character treatment.

The criminal may be made the object of a search, so that the interest is that of the chase; he may be exhibited as a symptom of social evil; or he may be examined ethically and psychologically as a study in motivation. all these types of treatment are to found in the Newgate novels, which are early examples of what later fiction was to do again and again [6].

These lines (or variations in treatment) were not clearly formed being just at the beginning of their development. But later on, they led to various genre modifications functioning as separate systems: crime fiction, detective novel and legal novel.

### The main part

Our argument is that in later nineteenth century Russian crime literature we see the development and adaptation of these strands – the Newgate novel, or later sensation novel – and it came along with the same sort of historical legal changes that had occurred in England in conjunction with the rise of this crime genre focused on the criminal's story.

A key moment was the beginning of the 1860s when E. Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* (1832) was first translated. The translation of this novel coincided with Dostoevsky's work on the novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866), in which the parallels to *Eugene Aram* are obvious. The receptive history of the social-criminal novel in Russian literature of the second half of the nineteenth century can be presented by such names of the English and Russian authors as W. Godwin, Ch. Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, E. Bulwer-Lytton, W. Collins on the one side, and L. Tolstoy, F. Dostoevsky, and N. Akhsharumov, on the other.

Being intercultural in its nature, there are, of course, differences between social-criminal novels in England and Russia conditioned by differing reflections of national character, contemporary social conditions, and an author's idiosyncracies. Fiction of this type is further affected by differences in the judicial systems that have been developed in these countries, and the attitude of public to such matters. To understand the national peculiarities of the genre

modification and explain specific character of the social-criminal novel reception in Russia one needs to compare development of relationship between this narrative form and legal system of each country.

An essential impact on crime fiction's evolution in England was made by dramatic changes to the legal system and the trial process from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. At the same time that the legal system increasingly began to hide the process of punishment, criminal trials expanded with an increasing presence of lawyers in court. The result was "the lawyerization of the criminal trial" and a "novelization" of the trial procedure, as J. Grossman, and others have observed. As Grossman writes, the crucial point here is that: the lawyers introduced a competition for narrative control which further made trials novelistic by turning a forum previously orchestrated solely by the judge into one organized around the sort of multiply authoritative voices which M. M. Bakhtin sees as characterizing the novel as a genre" [7].

Indeed, consideration of one and the same case from different points of view (lawyer, prosecutor, witness), each with its purpose formed the phenomenon close to what M. M. Bakhtin named polyglossia, which was readily transferred into novel as numerous writers took their plot from criminal cases or stories: "The crime continued to provide that necessary modicum of transgressive action, a plot for a narrative, but now there was also an agglomeration of details and a plumbing of character by the trial itself" [7].

A similar, even more dramatic shift can be observed in Russia almost 30 years later, after the legal reform in 1864 initiated by the government of Alexander II. As a result of that reform the Russian trial was transformed from a secret, written proceeding based on the "inquisitorial" principle into an open, public, oral proceeding: the structure of the court system was simplified, the institution of the attorneys' defense was established, and the trial by jury for major criminal offences was introduced. Although the Russian juridical reform borrowed elements from the English, French, and German legal systems, the ultimate result was nationally specific.

The juridical transformation affected drastically and immediately the periodical publications of the period. As H. Murav underlines,

The new public jury trials, the justices of the peace, and the new professionalized bar generated, in the press, an explosion of interest. Several new publications appeared devoted entirely to the courts: for example, Moscow and St. Petersburg each had its own *Juridical Gazette*. *The Court Gazette*, another St. Petersburg publication, was a daily [8].

Numerous civil journals also devoted a number of articles to the description of case investigation and to the comparison of legal and police systems in different countries, including England (such as *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, *Sovremennik*, *Birzhevye Vedomosti* and others). The new openness of the court anchored to the formation of a new discourse, a new juridical culture that penetrated into all layers of Russian life – political, economic, religious, and literary. The Russian writers were sure to be interested in criminal cases discussed in the pages of periodicals and often garnered their plot ideas from the court reports. It is not by chance that during the second half of the nineteenth century there appeared many novels that included in its plot either investigation of the case (*Crime and Punishment*), or the scenes of trial (*The Brothers Karamazov*, *Resurrection*).

We fully agree with H. Murrav who saw in the reception of the jury an orientation toward multiplicity and open-endedness, the celebration of a breakdown in the hierarchy of judgment, and the emergence of a new form of juridical heteroglossia in the public space. ... the changes brought by the reform – from secret to public hearing, from judge-centered administrative proceedings to jury trials – can be best characterized by the term *carnivalization* [8].

All these changes created definite atmosphere in which the Russian writers could take characters, motifs as well as psychological foundation for their writings. Besides, English and Russian crime fiction have one more common feature, namely, their close connection with periodical publications popular in the 19-th century in both cultures. As M. Knight underlines, “the interest of scholars in print culture and the commercial currents of nineteenth-century life extend to every area of Victorian literature; however, sensation fiction has been particularly prone to this sort of analysis, partly, perhaps, because the novelists who wrote such fiction were more willing than some of their peers to own up to the financial aspect of their trade” [9].

The similar process was defined by the researchers in Russia [10]. In this context one can better grasp their vivid interest in foreign crime fiction, especially English and French. Again, it is just at this time when Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s Newgate novel *Eugene Aram* was translated into Russian (1861).

The impact of Bulwer-Lytton’s Newgate novel *Eugene Aram* on Dostoevsky’s novel *Crime and Punishment* is proven, first of all, by their similar ideological frame. In fact, both novels were created in a period when utilitarian theory was popular and

both respond to it. In particular, Bulwer tries to repel Jeremy Bentham’s theory calling for the “the principle of the maximum Happiness” (aiming at “the greatest pleasure for the greatest number”). Bulwer-Lytton, not accepting Bentham’s theory, depicts the moral crisis of his hero in explicitly Utilitarian terms: “Disregarding any moral absolute, he [Eugene Aram] balances one choice against another, considering the greatest good of the greatest number, and self-interest betrays him” [11].

Dostoevsky is never as demonstrative and didactic as Bulwer is. The ideological foundation of *Crime and Punishment* is more complex, if polemical, with respect to a number of popular philosophic theories of the nineteenth century: J. S. Mill, D. Luce, Ch. Darwin, Th. Carlyle, and others. However, controversy with Bentham’s ideas and a conjunction of his theory with N. G. Chernyshevsky’s ethics of “reasonable egotism” is being emphasized through Dostoevsky’s novel.

For instance, one of the novel heroes – Looshin – is moralizing about the popular philosophic doctrine: “*But science says, ‘Love thyself above all, because everything in the world is founded on self-interest. Follow this, and thou manifest thy garment intact.’ Economic truth adds that the more society is organized on this theory – the theory of whole coats – the more solid and permanent are its foundations, and the more established are its personal affairs*” [12]. Looshin is not alone in his admiration of positive and utilitarian principles, but the images of Lebezyatnikov and Raskolnikov himself also show the insolvency of this common scientific concept.

There are also similarities of narrative form shared between both novels. The narration of *Eugene Aram* is given from an authorial narrator watching the peripetia of his characters and estimating or even directing them in the necessary way. Only the penultimate chapter, with the corresponding heading “The Confession. – And the Fate” is told in the first-person by the main hero Eugene Aram. Here the hero confesses his crime, explains his reasons for committing it, and describes his psychological transformations after the fatal event. Such transformations in the narrative helped the author to achieve specific psychology in the character depiction and show the minimal motion of his soul, subconscious thoughts of the criminal that was an innovative approach for such a kind of fiction.

Symptomatically, initially *Crime and Punishment* was conceived in the form of confession. However, in the process of comprehending the problems raised by the criminal Dostoevsky retrenched from first person to third. Obviously, the scale and complexity of the considered questions as

well as the writer's desire to show the main hero's ideas made Dostoevsky create the objective image of the author that participates in "great dialogue" of the novel as a whole", in doing so "the author's discourse about a character is organized as discourse about someone actually present, someone who hears him (the author) and is capable of answering him" [1].

Such an approach enhanced the development of "polyglossia" in the novel of Dostoevsky, where "the hero's self-consciousness, once it becomes the dominant, breaks down the monologic unity of the work ... The hero becomes relatively free and independent" [1]. However, taking into consideration the religious outlook of Dostoevsky, keeping distance in his author's position in the novel *Crime and Punishment*, one should admit that the author in his novel stands always on the same point of view that is presented as the highest, requiring no proofs and solving all arguments by means of comparison of the heroes' ideas with the Gospel. This is the idea about the fact that the truth is in Christ, or at least in human faith in Christ. According to P. H. Brazier, "he [Raskolnikov] admits his guilt, publicly, confesses to the authorities and takes his punishment: exile to a Siberian prison camp. Sonya follows and waits for him to serve his sentence: this, for Dostoevsky, is resurrection as it is woven into the heart of existence following on from Christ's resurrection" [13]. This position defines the way Dostoevsky's approaches his heroes in narrative terms.

A number of plot resemblances also help prove the implicit intertextual connection between the English and Russian writers. Searching for the theme Dostoevsky – like the authors of many Newgate novels – turned to actual criminal accounts, though the inner plot is built on the basis of the Gospel concept of a man that is presented for the Russian writer as eternal and immovable. That is why in his main hero the two incompatible poles of the worldview are united.

For Dostoevsky the choice of a hero was of particular importance as the entire Russian literature was in search for its hero. In this context there appeared characters of Turgenev (Bazarov) and Chernyshevsky (Rakhmetov) presenting new generation of young people from the middle class (so-called *raznochinets*). The literary situation explains Dostoevsky's interest in Eugene Aram as a representative of foreign intellectuals capable of transgressing the laws of society. As I. Kliger states, "Dostoevsky's socially underdetermined (*raznochinets*) hero is thus best understood as a formal condition of the possibility of exploring Russia's position at the intersection point of multiple historical vectors" [14].

Interestingly, a similarly ambivalent characterization is inherent to the hero of Bulwer-Lytton's novel. Describing Eugene Aram's character Bulwer-Lytton underlines the combination of his opposite qualities: "*It could not be said that Aram wanted benevolence, but it was dashed, and mixed with a certain scorn: the benevolence was the offspring of his nature; the scorn seemed the result of his pursuits. He would feed the birds from his window, he would tread aside to avoid the worm on his path; were one of his own tribe in danger, he would save him at the hazard of his life: – yet in his heart he despised men, and believe them beyond amelioration*" [15].

Arrogant in their relations to others, both heroes do sometimes nonetheless perform generous acts and expose their lives to danger. In this context, the given contradictions of the crimes themselves become clearer – both, loving humankind, kill men. For Dostoevsky, as for Bulwer-Lytton, this is certain to be some symbolic act showing their heroes' conviction in the fact that humankind is to be redeemed. Born in the heroes' soul and then realized this idea becomes the main structure-forming principle of the two novels.

The crime in both works has similar peculiarities: both heroes commit it against a despicable man, not deserving life from their points of view. In doing so both Aram and Raskolnikov try to formulate the theoretical foundation for their action to find the metaphysical justification for it. Here, for example, is the reasoning of the English hero presented in his confession: "*What was this wretch? aged and vice – forestalling time – tottering on to a dishonored grave – soiling all that he touched on his way – with grey hairs and filthy lewdness, the rottenness of the heart, not its passion, a nuisance and a curse to the world. What was the deed – that I should rid the earth of a thing at once base and venomous? Was it crime? Was it justice? Within myself I felt the will – the spirit that might bless mankind.*" He then gives the explanation for his action: "*I looked on the deed I was about to commit as a great and solemn sacrifice to Knowledge, whose Priest I was*" [15].

We may be reminded of the words of the student heard by Raskolnikov in a tavern which "excited him immensely": "*I have hitherto been joking, but now listen to this. On the one side here is a silly, flint-hearted, evil-minded, sulky old woman, necessary to no one – on the contrary, pernicious to all – and who does not know herself why she lives*" [12].

So, striving to make humankind happy the heroes commit crimes. From their point of view the murder for noble purpose justifies their actions, and

all the more so because they were committed by the strong man that both heroes consider themselves. Both, committing the crime, think of a man and life in general, about themselves and the scale of their personality whom, as they seem, are permitted everything, even violence, breaking the common moral laws.

It is a characteristic feature that after their deed committed due to the ideological considerations, in the name of humankind, both heroes feel deep disappointment. Eugene Aram describes these transformations in his soul after the crime in detail: *“I occupied my thoughts – I laid up new hoards within my mind – I looked around, and I saw few whose stores were like my own, - but where, with the passion for wisdom still alive within me – where was that once more ardent desire which had cheated me across so dark a chasm between youth and manhood – between past and present life – the desire of applying that wisdom to the service of mankind? Gone – dead – buried forever in my bosom, with the thousand dreams that had perished before it! When the deed was done, mankind seemed suddenly to have grown my foes. I looked upon them with other eyes”* [15].

Similar transformations of his conscious take place in Raskolnikov. Every insignificant detail in narration plays an essential, symbolic role showing the fact that the hero looks at the world with changed eyes. The most exponential in this case are well known scenes: Raskolnikov is getting indifferent witness of attempt for the woman’s committing suicide on the bridge, his meeting with mother and sister, his sickness. As P.H. Brazier puts it, *“His conscious will not allow him to settle, it convicts him of the depravity and awfulness of his crime. He is plagued by hallucinations and guilt-ridden nightmares for weeks after the murders”* [13].

However, the significant differences in the analyzed writings are obvious both in plot structure and in character depiction. The plot development of the English novel makes sufficient merely one-dimension of Eugene Aram’s behavior. Eugene Aram is not tormented with the remorse, he goes on his life in harmony with himself and the environment.

Dostoevsky tries to prove by his novel that having only logic and theory at his disposal (moreover, the theory of violence) the world cannot be changed for the better because there are the laws of human conscience which nobody can transgress without consequences and about which Raskolnikov hoped to forget easily. In contrast to Eugene Aram Dostoevsky’s hero suffers morally and physically after his crime being on the rack among friends and relatives, without consolation from beneficial actions. The main idea of the novel consists in show of the

criminal’s inner suffering compelling him not only to confess in crime waywardly but also call himself a sinner and his theory – a mistake. Raskolnikov changes the idea of revolt against God into love and faith, he rises from the dead in the epilogue breaking his idol and believing in Christ.

From the very beginning Bulwer-Lytton presents his hero as a fatalist. Aram demonstrates the predestination of human fate including the crime in it: *“The colors of our existence were doomed before our birth – our sorrows and our crimes; ... the Eternal and all-seeing Ruler of the universe, Destiny, or God, had here fixed the moment of our birth and the limits of our career. What then is crime? – Fate! What life? – Submission!”* [15]. Hence, the English hero does not search for excuses for his crime believing that nothing depends in him and nothing can be changed.

Raskolnikov explains his action differently. According to his theory described in his article *“On Crime”*, people are divided into strong and ordinary men. The hero relates himself to the first category. It is this implement to *“extraordinary”* people that gives him the right, in Raskolnikov’s opinion, to commit the crime to prove this implement to himself: *“all legislators and rulers of men, commencing with earliest down to Lycurgus, Solon, Mahomet, Napoleon, etc. etc., have one and all been criminals, for, whilst giving new laws, they have naturally broken through older ones which had been faithfully observed by society and transmitted by its progenitors. These men most certainly never hesitated to shed blood, as soon as they saw the advantage of doing so. It may even be remarked”* [12].

Such non-coincidences in the heroes’ ideology of Bulwer and Dostoyevsky are sure to lead to more crucial difference in their images: *“Without stopping half-way like Bulwer, Dostoyevsky and his hero bring their ideas to the extreme. Accepting the ultraindividualistic theory, Raskolnikov makes the final conclusion from it with merciless logics and applies this conclusion for practice without hesitation: as a genius man has the right to kill, he will kill. Having killed, he tries to escape from the remorse and punishment like a really great man. But Dostoyevsky is a Christian, but not a hypocritical Christian like Bulwer. His faith has the entire strength of the primeval ages. The criminal has to repent and expiate his guilt”* [11].

### Findings

As we see, Messac’s separation of the authors’ positions in the novels *Eugene Aram* and *Crime and Punishment* underlines the significance in Dostoyevsky’s novel of not only the social-historical

and moral level but also the universal sense of narration connected with the author's orientation to the eternal Christian truth that is absent in Bulwer's novel. We fully agree with this statement. The narration itself – the system of Raskolnikov's doubles, the Gospel subtext, the novel temporality and space – draws the important plot line about the hero who raised himself, but in this case he is not an absolute atheist, he moves (through submissiveness of his haughtiness and union with the people) from destruction of Pharisaism in himself to the birth of a new man in himself. It is the aspect that can be thought of as a crucial difference in the English and Russian heroes.

Thus, the analysis presented allows for making a conclusion about the intertextual relations between two very different, separated in time and space novels of Bulwer-Lytton. Those relations are obvious both at the level of plot and narration as well as in the images of the main heroes. Against the background of the presented comparison the artistic peculiarities of each writer are seen clearer, there is a possibility to consider their writings from the new points of view. In general one should confess that the Newgate novel not being accepted in its complete form in the Russian literature of the 19-th century was perceived via its theme and plot construction.

#### Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Jonathan Grossman, associate professor of California University, LA for his book *The Art of Alibi: English law courts and novel* which was extremely helpful for our research as well as for his thoughtful comments on the given paper.

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7/15/2014