



UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Poe's Legacy

Exploring the Connection of his Analytical Tales with Modern Criminalistics

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Salamanca, 2024

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of English Studies

Date: June 2024

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Signature

Abstract

In the vast panorama of literature, certain authors have left an imprint that transcends the pages of their works, influencing unexpected fields; among them, Edgar Allan Poe stands out, whose narrative genius not only captivates, but also intertwines in a singular way with fields as diverse as criminal investigation. The aim of this essay is to study the connection between Poe's detective stories and modern criminalistics. An interdisciplinary analysis has been employed, combining literary elements of the aforementioned stories with concepts and practices of current criminalistics science, focusing on *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* and *The Purloined Letter*. The results have shown that Auguste Dupin, as presented by Edgar Allan Poe, reveals himself as a visionary precursor of modern forensic techniques. In conclusion, the enduring relevance of Poe's analytical tales has been highlighted, underlining their anticipatory character in the evolution of criminal investigation.

Keywords

Criminal investigation, detective stories, criminalistics, Dupin, analytical tales.

Resumen

En el vasto panorama de la literatura, ciertos autores han dejado una impronta que trasciende las páginas de sus obras, influyendo en ámbitos inesperados; entre ellos, destaca Edgar Allan Poe, cuya genialidad narrativa no solo cautiva, sino que también se entrelaza de manera singular con campos tan diversos como la investigación criminal. El objetivo de este ensayo es estudiar la conexión entre los relatos detectivescos de Poe y la criminalística moderna. Se ha empleado un análisis interdisciplinario, combinando elementos literarios de los citados relatos con conceptos y prácticas de la ciencia criminalística actual, focalizado en *Los Crímenes de la Calle Morgue*, *El Misterio de Marie Rogêt* y *La Carta Robada*. Los resultados han evidenciado que Auguste Dupin, conforme lo presenta Edgar Allan Poe, se revela como un visionario precursor de las técnicas forenses modernas. En conclusión, se ha destacado la perdurable relevancia de los cuentos analíticos de Poe, subrayando su carácter anticipatorio en la evolución de la investigación criminal.

Palabras clave

Investigación criminal, relatos detectivescos, criminalística, Dupin, cuentos analíticos.

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Introduction

In the prose poem *Eureka*, Edgar Allan Poe reveals an uncanny ability to anticipate scientific theories that would develop decades after his time. Although known primarily as a master of horror, Poe demonstrated in this work, written in 1848, a remarkable insight into avant-garde concepts such as black holes or the cyclical creation of the universe (Rigal and Marín 113-14), demonstrating that his genius transcends the boundaries of literature and enters the realm of speculative science. Like the illustrious minds of Jules Verne and Leonardo Da Vinci, Poe goes beyond the conventional limits of understanding, amalgamating the artistic and the scientific. His ability to explore both the recesses of the human mind and the mysteries of the universe places him on a par with those visionary geniuses, where intuition becomes the common thread that weaves together the genius of these towering figures. However, Poe did not approach scientific anticipation only in *Eureka*, his entire oeuvre is impregnated with it and a good example are the detective stories (also called analytical), where Poe, through the wanderings of the amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin, portrays the solving of crimes through analytical and deductive methods.

This work aims to study the relationship between the methods of investigation described in Edgar Allan Poe's analytical stories and the investigative procedures used in modern criminal science. An essay on this topic provides an opportunity to explore meaningful connections between literature and science, offering a deeper understanding of how literary ideas can intertwine with scientific thought and practice. To achieve this purpose, the study is based primarily on the analysis of the methods of criminal investigation set out in the stories *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* and *The Purloined Letter* and their comparison with the practices that make up modern-day criminal science. For the latter, current legal regulations on the subject were analysed, as well as criminalistics manuals used by modern forensic investigators. The essay is structured in a comprehensive manner, addressing three key points. First, it compares the figure of Dupin with the detective of the twenty-first century, highlighting similarities and contrasts in their investigative methods. Second, it analyses whether Dupin uses a scientifically based methodology in the application of these methods. The third point explores whether Dupin makes use of modern criminalistics practices, examining the crime scene, evidence gathering and interrogation techniques.

1. Dupin and the detective of the twenty-first century

Although Dupin is a fictional character from the nineteenth century, his methods and systematic approach to solving crimes share similarities with the roles and responsibilities of modern real detectives. His role in Edgar Allan Poe's tales anticipates, to some extent, the professional and scientific approach that characterises crime investigation today.

This investigative task is currently undertaken by specialised agents belonging to the different police forces. In Spain, the *Ley de Enjuiciamiento Criminal*, a law that regulates judicial proceedings relating to any criminal process, establishes that the purpose of the Judicial Police is “averiguar los delitos públicos que se cometieren en su territorio o demarcación; practicar, según sus atribuciones, las diligencias necesarias para comprobarlos y descubrir a los delincuentes, y recoger todos los efectos, instrumentos o pruebas del delito” (“to investigate public crimes committed in its territory or demarcation; to carry out, according to its powers, the necessary diligences to verify them and discover the criminals, and to collect all the effects, instruments or evidence of the crime”; art. 282; my trans.).

Moreover, from the study of the three detective stories on which this study is based, it is obvious that Dupin, in his adventures, is involved in the investigation of specific crimes, such as murders and robberies, in a manner similar to that of a member of the Judicial Police. His main objective is, according to him, the truth: “My ultimate object is only the truth” (Poe 159); that is, to understand the nature of the crimes and to discover the perpetrators. Moreover, like the Judicial Police, Dupin carries out meticulous investigations to gather proof and evidence to help him solve crimes: “Dupin, meanwhile, examining the whole neighbourhood, as well as the house, with a minuteness of attention for which I could see no possible objet” (Poe 153). He also examines crime scenes: “Dupin scrutinized every thing - not excepting the bodies of the victims” (Poe 153), interrogates witnesses: “You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue” (Poe 164) and analyses physical and documentary evidence, for example, by collecting all the newspapers that had published news about the death of Marie Rogêt (Poe 173). Furthermore, Dupin strives to identify the criminals and expose their motivations and methods: “We are not engaged in an attempt to discover the scene, but to produce the perpetrators of the murder” (Poe 200), which coincides with the aim of the Judicial Police to discover the culprits.

Therefore, we can argue that C. Auguste Dupin exercises functions similar to those of the Judicial Police insofar as he engages in crime-finding, investigation, evidence-gathering and the identification of criminals in his stories. His deductive approach and methods reflect the work of modern police investigators in solving crimes.

2. The Scientific mind of Dupin

It is now universally accepted that science plays a crucial role in criminal investigation, because it provides an objective, evidence-based framework for solving crimes. In Spain, the *Real Decreto 769/1987*, on the regulation of the Judicial Police, establishes that the agents of the Judicial Police “desempeñarán cometidos de investigación criminal especializada propios de una Policía científica” (“will carry out specialized criminal investigation tasks typical of a *scientific* Police”; art. 28; my trans.; emphasis added). Therefore, we can conclude that modern criminal investigation is mainly based on the use of observation and reasoning.

In the three stories that are the subject of this study, it is clear that Dupin's skill as a detective is the result of the rigorous application of logical reasoning and scientific methods in his investigations. It is not surprising, then, that Wood defined Dupin as “the perfect solver of riddles by the employment of infallible reason” (104). In fact, the detective himself stresses the value of observation in his method, describing it as “a species of necessity” (Poe 146). Likewise, Dupin asserts that analysis requires a systematic method, a condition that is lacking in both the Parisian police, for “there is no method in their proceedings”, and the director of the Sûreté, Vidocq, a man “without educated thought” (Poe 152).

Furthermore, Dupin's comments make it clear that his reasoning is not based on conjecture: “I will not pursue these guesses ... I could not pretend to make them intelligible to the understanding of another” (Poe 162-63), nor on irrational beliefs: “neither of us believe in praeternatural events” (Poe 156), but on empirical facts: “Both science and experience show that the period of their rising is, and necessarily must be, indeterminate” (Poe 185).

From the above, we can conclude that the analysis of Dupin's ability as a detective and the application of scientific methods in his investigations not only sheds light on his literary figure, but also underlines the importance of logic, systematic observation and deductive thinking in crime solving, principles that are also fundamental in modern criminal investigation.

3. Dupin and the methodology of criminal investigation.

According to Aguilar, “la criminalística analiza indicios y evidencias, es decir, todos los objetos relacionados con la escena del crimen con el fin de identificar quién es la víctima y el victimario” (“criminalistics analyzes clues and evidence, i.e. all objects related to the crime scene in order to identify the victim and the perpetrator”; 181; my trans.). Therefore, criminalistics is a multidisciplinary science that encompasses several areas of study.

In the following, we will discuss how Dupin employs methods that resemble the practices of protection, preservation and analysis of evidence specific to each of the areas of study of criminalistics.

3.1. The scene of the crime

The relationship between the detective Auguste Dupin and the scene of the crime is fundamental in Edgar Allan Poe's work, especially in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. For Dupin, the location of the scene is also essential: "There can be no doubt, therefore, that the spot of this appalling outrage has been discovered" (179), as it provides the initial context and primary evidence for understanding what happened. However, Dupin's genius in examining not only the primary crime scene, but also other locations related to the event, lies in his understanding that the resolution of a case is not limited to the obvious: "we will discard the interior points of this tragedy, and concentrate our attention upon its outskirts" (191). In exploring beyond the obvious, he demonstrates an ability to see patterns and connections that elude other investigators: "He [Vidocq, the director of the Sûreté] impaired his vision by holding the object too close" (152), thus revealing the depth of his astuteness and his ability to approach cases holistically.

On the preservation of the crime scene, modern crime doctrine states that in order to avoid contamination of the scene "todo el personal interviniente debe hacer el máximo esfuerzo para asegurarlo y protegerlo" ("all personnel involved must make every effort to secure and protect it"; Guzmán 41; my trans.). In relation to this issue, for Poe, the protection of the crime scene is, in his analytical tales, a critical aspect. Thus, the phrase "[a]s soon as they forced an entrance, they reclosed the door, to keep out the crowd" (149) shows the importance of preserving the crime scene by preventing unauthorised entry, which could contaminate or destroy evidence. Likewise, the remark "[t]he disorders of the room had, as usual, been suffered to exist" (153) suggests that the investigators chose to keep the crime scene intact, without making alterations that could affect the evidence. This approach is consistent with best practice in modern criminal investigation, where preservation of the crime scene in its original state is essential for accurate evidence collection.

On the other hand, ocular inspection implies a closer and more systematic examination of the site, often for the purpose of gathering specific evidence. In this sense, Poe's ability to lead the reader from the observation phase, with the detailed description of the crime scene of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter (147-48), to the actual ocular inspection phase, where "[t]here was not an inch of any portion of the house which was not

carefully searched” (150). Of course, Dupin does not forget the ocular inspection of the surroundings of the crime scene, “examining the whole neighbourhood, as well as the house, with a minuteness of attention for which I could see no possible object” (153), an inspection that will provide him with valuable evidence for the resolution of the case: “I picked the ribbon up at the foot of the lightning-rod” (163).

Thus, Edgar Allan Poe reveals a striking similarity between the methods of investigation used in the nineteenth century by Auguste Dupin and the modern practices of criminologists. The meticulous inspection of the crime scene, the attention to detail, and the logical deduction employed by Dupin clearly reflect the fundamental principles that guide contemporary crime-solving professionals.

3.2. Evidence gathering

The rigorous collection of evidence at the crime scene is another essential pillar of criminal investigation. The study of the crime scene has its essence in Edmund Locard's Principle, enunciated in his work *Manuel de techniques policières*: “Il est impossible au malfaiteur d'agir, et surtout d'agir avec l'intensité que suppose l'action criminelle, sans laisser des traces de son passage” (“it is impossible for a criminal to act, and especially to act with the intensity that criminal action requires, without leaving behind traces of his presence”; 80; my trans.). In Poe's narratives, the study of clues and evidence is essential to solving crimes, emphasizing the need for a multidisciplinary approach that combines observation, forensic science and deductive thinking.

One of the most decisive pieces of evidence in a criminal process is the presence of fingerprints, the study of which is carried out through the dactyloscopy, which consists of the study of fingerprints with the objective of identifying the perpetrator of a crime. A clear example of the use of fingerprints in criminal investigation in Poe's narratives is found in the story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, where Dupin carefully examines the marks found on the throat of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye: “deep indentations of finger nails” (162), accurately establishes their origin: “evidently the impression of fingers” (162) and is able to rule out, on the basis of the size of the palm of the alleged murderer's hand, human involvement in the murder: “This”, I said, “is the mark of no human hand” (162). Today, fingerprints constitute an absolute form of identification of an individual, becoming the most valuable physical evidence that can be found at a crime scene. (Guzman 93).

Another branch of forensic science is trichology, which deals with the study of hair, in order to obtain information about possible victims or suspects. In relation to this subject,

in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Dupin uses detailed observations on the hair found at the crime scene to deduce key aspects of the situation. In the aforementioned story, Auguste Dupin is able to identify that certain hair belonged to Madame L'Espanaye: "On the hearth were thick tresses - very thick tresses- of gray human hair" (161) and that these had been "torn out by the roots" (161), concluding that the perpetrator must have possessed superhuman strength to execute the action, thus ruling out human intervention. This fact is later confirmed when Dupin finds the orangutan's hair between Madame L'Espanaye's fingers: "This hair is most unusual -this is no human hair" (161). In another Poe story, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, Dupin explains how Monsieur Beauvais (a supposed admirer of Marie) manages to identify the corpse of the deceased through some distinguishing feature of Marie's arm hair: "He must have spoken of some peculiarity in this hair. It must have been a peculiarity of color, of quantity, of length, or of situation" (186). Currently, the successful investigation of crimes against persons is materially supported by the examination of hairs, being useful to identify the perpetrator. (Guzman 109).

There is another criminalistic technique hidden within Poe's analytical tales. It is graphistics, the discipline in charge of the analysis of handwriting in forensic terms. In relation to this matter, in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* we find a passage where Dupin suggests the use of graphistic techniques when he plans to compare the handwritten messages addressed to a certain newspaper, with the authentic handwriting of the naval officer, in order to evaluate the possible participation of said officer in Marie's murder: "And, all this done, let us again compare these various communications with the known MSS. of the officer" (204-05). Dupin uses handwriting comparison to unravel the mystery, highlighting the importance of scientific application in solving crimes. Today, forensic graphistics, used for handwriting expertise, constitutes one of the most serious investigative procedures in criminalistics (Buquet 50).

Apart from the above, voice analysis plays a crucial role in solving the murder of Madame and Mademoiselle L'Espanaye, in the story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. In fact, through witness statements about the mysterious voices heard in the apartment, the astute detective C. Auguste Dupin uses the peculiarities of sound to unravel the enigma, identify the perpetrator and reveal the role of his accomplice. Thus, Dupin concludes that the voices heard do not belong to those of the victims: "That the voices heard in contention ... were not the voices of the women themselves, was fully proved by the evidence" (155), furthermore, that the shrill voice (actually emitted by an orang-utan) did not match any known language: "But in regard to the shrill voice ... each one spoke of it as that of a foreigner"

(155), “a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification” (161) and, likewise, that the expression “mon Dieu!” was characterized by one of the witnesses as “an expression of remonstrance or expostulation” (162), evidencing the innocence of the animal's owner. Nowadays, forensic acoustics, which deals with the analysis of sound in order to solve crimes, is a real tool in criminal investigations. (Huertas 5).

For all these reasons, Auguste Dupin not only personifies cunning and deduction, but also anticipates and employs techniques that would later become fundamental in modern criminalistic investigation. From the analysis of fingerprints and hair samples to the application of graphistic and acoustic forensic techniques, Dupin demonstrates the validity and effectiveness of these methods in solving crimes.

3.2. Police interrogation techniques

Hans and Vidmar's data reveal the importance of police interrogation, estimating that, in the context of the global caseload, around eighty-five percent of judicial decisions are based on testimony (Arce & Fariña 1). In Spain, interrogation is regulated, among other norms, by the *Ley de Enjuiciamiento Criminal*. This law provides for the manner in which statements are taken from defendants (art. 385) or witnesses (art. 410).

In Edgar Allan Poe's stories featuring Auguste Dupin, the examination of witnesses plays a crucial role in solving crimes. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Dupin relies heavily on the testimony of witnesses to solve the case. Also in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, Dupin uses witness statements to reconstruct the sequence of events of the crime and reach a conclusion to the case. Finally, in *The Purloined Letter*, Dupin's skilful interrogation of Prefect G. provides him with all the facts necessary to solve the enigma.

Interrogations are an essential part of Poe's analytical tales. Literarily speaking, the witnesses' testimonies provide the reader with first-hand information about the facts and give the story a stamp of veracity. When Poe writes: “Many individuals have been examined in relation to this most extraordinary and frightful affair” (148) and later: “fresh examinations of witnesses instituted” (152), apart from suggesting the rarity and complexity of the case, he is using the “micro-narratives” of the witnesses to reconstruct the background of the victims. For Dupin, the statements of those involved are a critical issue in the murder of Marie Rogêt: “I procured, at the Prefecture, a full report of all the evidence elicited” (173). The strength of the testimonies lies in the fact that they are sometimes the support of strong arguments: “I do not hesitate to say that legitimate deductions ... are in themselves sufficient

to engender a suspicion” (156) or the key to the solution of the mystery: “Upon these two words [mon Dieu!], therefore, I have mainly built my hopes of a full solution of the riddle” (162). For this reason, Dupin maintains the need to interrogate all those involved in an event, even if they are far from the scene of the crime: “the police, who, as far as I can understand from the Prefect, have not troubled themselves, in any respect, with an examination of the naval officer alluded to” (193). However, sometimes witness testimonies serve to invalidate arguments that were believed to be solid: “some important information reached the police, which seemed to overthrow, at least, the chief portion of Le Commercial's argument” (178).

In addition to the above, in the three analytical tales that are the subject of the present study we find that Poe anticipates certain techniques, in terms of the taking of evidence from those involved, that are widely used today. One of them is the use of what is known today as the “Narrative Interview”, a form of interrogation in which the interviewer's participation is kept to a minimum, and witnesses are allowed to speak about their experience in their own words: “You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue” (164). In this respect, research shows that this type of interrogation provides more correct information than traditional interrogation (Köhnken et al. 3-27). In addition, Poe is almost one hundred and fifty years ahead of the current technique of the “Cognitive Interview”: “Queries, skilfully directed, will not fail to elicit, from some of these parties, information on this particular point (or upon others) -information which the parties themselves may not even be aware of possessing” (Poe 205). Cognitive Interviewing, developed by Fisher, Geiselman & Amador in 1988, is based on the retrieval of memories according to memory theories (722-27). Research has shown that this technique improves both the quantity and quality of information obtained compared to the traditional interview (Arce & Fariña 14-15).

Thus, taking the above into account, Poe's detective stories reveal not only the author's literary mastery, but also his pioneering vision in terms of certain techniques of criminalistics. Poe not only employed, through Dupin, methods similar to those used today, but also anticipated several fundamental strategies employed by contemporary detectives in solving crimes.

Conclusions

A detailed analysis of Auguste Dupin's functions and methods in Edgar Allan Poe's stories reveals a striking anticipation of modern techniques used in criminal investigation. By diving into the analytical tales, we have broken down the methodical application of

Dupin, who, beyond being simply a fictional detective, becomes a paradigmatic forerunner of contemporary forensic science.

The similarity between Dupin's functions and those of a contemporary forensic investigator is striking. Dupin is dedicated to the investigation of specific crimes, such as murders and robberies, employing rational and scientific methods. The use of this scientifically based methodology makes him a pioneer in the application of science in crime solving, anticipating contemporary practices in criminal science.

The importance of preserving the scene of the crime is another prominent feature of Poe's analytical tales. This approach is essential for accurate evidence collection, a perspective consistent with modern evidence preservation techniques in criminal investigation.

The collection of evidence, another essential pillar of criminal investigation, reveals Poe's anticipation of contemporary forensic disciplines. Fingerprinting, trichology, graphistics and forensic acoustics are intertwined in the stories, where Dupin uses these methods to identify, analyze and deduce, paving the way for modern forensic investigation techniques.

The interrogation of witnesses also plays a crucial role in solving crimes in Poe's stories. It is particularly notable how Poe, through Dupin, anticipates specific techniques used today, such as the "Narrative Interview" and the "Cognitive Interview", showing a pioneering vision in the incorporation of more efficient methods in the elicitation of testimony.

In conclusion, the figure of Auguste Dupin, as presented by Edgar Allan Poe, emerges as a visionary forerunner of the techniques and methods employed in modern forensic science. Deductive insight, attention to detail, rigorous application of scientific methods, and anticipation of specific techniques demonstrate Poe's genius in incorporating elements that, over time, have become fundamental to crime solving.

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