

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA  
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA  
GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES  
Trabajo de Fin de Grado

# The figure of detective as created by Edgar Allan Poe in Dupin Trilogy

Alumno/a: Cristina González López  
Tutor/a: Daniel Pastor García



Salamanca, 2019

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA  
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA  
GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES  
Trabajo de Fin de Grado

The figure of the detective as  
created by Edgar Allan Poe in  
the Dupin Trilogy

This thesis is submitted for the degree of English  
Studies

Date

Tutor: Daniel Pastor García

Vº Bº

  
Signature Daniel Pastor García

## Table of Contents

Abstract/ Resumen .....	4
Introduction .....	5
1. The relevance of the detective's reasoning process .....	6
2. The duality between the detective and the reader .....	10
Conclusion .....	13
Works Cited .....	15

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to offer an analysis of the detective C. Auguste Dupin, the main character in the Dupin Trilogy, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, “The Mystery of Marie Roget”, and “The Purloined Letter”, by exploring his power of reasoning in order to resolve mysteries. In addition, this study presents the relationship perceived between the detective and the reader, since their main purpose is to find a solution for the mysteries and murders.

**KEY WORDS:** Dupin, reasoning method, duality.

## RESUMEN

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado tiene como objetivo final ofrecer un análisis del detective C. Auguste Dupin, el personaje principal de la Trilogía de Dupin de Edgar Allan Poe: “The Murder in the Rue Morgue”, “The Mystery of Marie Roget”, y “The Purloined Letter”, explorando su poder de razonamiento para resolver misterios. Además, este estudio presenta la relación que se percibe entre el detective y el lector, siendo su propósito principal encontrar solución a los misterios y asesinatos.

**KEYWORDS:** Dupin, método de razonamiento, dualidad.

## INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe is considered one of the most representative authors of Dark Romanticism due to his fascination with the dark and the irrational. Most of his poems and best tales focus on terror and self-destruction. Moreover, Poe is a relevant author, since he is considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. Professor William T. Bandy defended that Poe was the inventor of this literary genre and, in this way, Poe has influenced many succeeding writers. Bandy also insisted in the fact that one of the main factors contributing to Poe's extraordinary success was the introduction of an innovative fictional character, his quick-witted and unconventional criminologist C. Auguste Dupin.

For that reason, in this paper, I will examine the figure of the detective in the Dupin Trilogy: "The Murders in Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter", because its main character, C. Auguste Dupin, served as a prototype for many others authors who later created a detective figure, such Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle and Hercules Poirot by Agatha Christie. Detective fiction begins in the English-speaking world in 1841 with the publication of "The Murders in Rue Morgue" in which the first fictional detective is presented with a well-defined profile: C Auguste Dupin, an eccentric, logical, brilliant, educated person. This is where Edgar Allan Poe creates the definitive formula for the plot: his tales mix an element of crime with an element of detection involving, and including, an element of eccentric behaviour. As Tawnee Sparling discussed in "Rationalism and Romanticism in Detective Fiction",

The formula of the detective story consists of an investigator unlocking the connections among crime scenes, . . . victims, motives, and modi operandi into a single coherent scheme that guides him to suspects and ultimately to a

perpetrator. In addition, detective fiction involves . . . the story of investigation which occurs in the present tense as the rising action in contrast to the story of the crime in which the conclusive findings . . . take us back to the past. (201).

As a result of this, detective fiction always has to deal with an investigation which takes place in the present tense contrasting with the story of a crime in which the conclusive findings are related to past crimes.

Therefore, my purpose is to analyse the role of the detective in these three short stories by exploring the detective's reasoning process, which places him as a superior being due to his ability to solve extremely difficult crimes and, I shall also discuss, the duality represented by the reader and the detective.

#### 1. THE RELEVANCE OF THE DETECTIVE'S REASONING PROCESS

The first idea is related to Poe's amazing way of representation, which he uses to highlight the reasoning process and method used by Dupin. Dupin's procedures are more complex than "intelligently reasoning" to find a solution, because he conforms to the circumstances and characteristics of the crime that must be solved. Thus, Poe uses different schemes to depict the figure of the detective's reasoning process in the three short stories; firstly, in "The Murders in Rue Morgue" Dupin resolves the "impossible problem" of a crime that is committed in a locked room. Secondly, the solving of the problem outside the scene of the crime through information acquired from newspapers in "The Mystery of Marie Roget", and finally the psychological deception method in "The Purloined Letter".

Dupin is not really a detective and his motivation in "The Murders in Rue Morgue" is to investigate the murders to entertain himself and prove the innocence of a wrongly accused man. This idea is clearly reflected in the story: at first, the

police investigations seem to fail, even when the people who present their testimony are looking for a solution. They try to give interesting clues aiming to clarify this macabre episode. However, the discouraging scenario changes its course once Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin begins to look for evidence and relate data, in order to unveil this mystery that has Adolphe Lebon imprisoned for having been the last individual to see the victims alive. Dupin and his friend, the narrator, go to the scene of the crime to consider the events that occurred in the murder; after this, Dupin analyses the situation to offer a different testimony which exonerates the falsely accused “the gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and activity, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once” (28). With ingenuity, Dupin offers an extraordinary explanation that, finally, shows that Mr. Lebon has been unfairly accused since, according to Dupin’s deduction, the person responsible for the crimes cannot be, under any circumstances, a human: “it is the mark of no human hand . . . It was a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Island.” (28). Dupin is portrayed as a dehumanized thinking machine, a man whose only interest is pure logic. Through the use of reason, Dupin shows his considerable intellect by putting himself in the mind of the criminal. Therefore, his method is to think at the level of the criminal and enter his mind; knowing how a criminal thinks, he can solve any crime. With this system, he combines scientific logic with artistic imagination: as a true observer, he pays special attention to what nobody notices, such as indecision, impatience and other characteristics. This idea is defended strongly by Gerald Kennedy; “Poe . . . established the prototype of the modern detective story by focusing on the investigative methods of a master sleuth” (184).

After “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, the following short story is “The Mystery of Marie Roget”, in which, again Dupin is represented as a human thinking machine because he is incited to solve a new crime when he reads about the events in the newspaper. Even the Parisian police, need his help to solve the tragedy: “I may readily be supposed that the part played by my friend, in the drama at the Rue Morgue had not failed of its impression upon the fancies of the Parisian police. With its emissaries, the name of Dupin had growth into a household Word” (828-829). In this story, the method used by Dupin is again his magnificent deduction through reason to discover Marie Roget’s killer. In addition, the most extraordinary fact is his method of deduction -he resolves the crime without going to the crime scene, only receiving information from what the newspapers tell him, thus creating his own solution from the testimony of one of the suspect and from a report with all the testimonies written by the narrator: “In the morning, I procured, at the Prefecture, a full report of all evidence elicited, and, at the various newspaper offices, a copy of every paper in which, from first to last, had been published any decisive information in regard to this sad affair” (42). Therefore, Dupin can be considered a superior man, since he shows his considerable intellect by using the ratiocinative method which is the most relevant aspect in Poe’s stories, as Bennet notes:

Poe . . . turns to the ratiocinative tale as the literary form that most effectively includes both the quest for meaning and the final deciphering of uncovered symbols; it represents a victory for the ordering mind. The man who creates order out of the heterogeneity of casual fact duplicates the divine act of creation (267).

Subsequent to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget”, there is a third story: “The Purloined Letter” in which this reasoning



method is also used by Poe but, from the point of view of psychological deceit. In this story, Dupin solves the mystery by finding the letter purloined by the minister using rationality and his analytical method: "Dupin sees what the Prefect of Police cannot, blinded as he is by mere rationality and the failure to imagine a cleverer criminal. Dupin does this, easily obtains the letter, and the case is closed" (Flower 153). Dupin is again needed by the police, in this case by Mr G; "Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G's saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble" (83). In order to discover the solution to this mystery, Poe's detective recurs to the deceit in three moments throughout the finding: first of all, he goes to the minister's house after it has been previously inspected by the police, there he wears green glasses, which enable him observe any detail, although in appearance, these glasses indicate that Dupin has difficulties with his sight. After a long time, Dupin finds the place where the letter is hidden. The next day, Dupin returns to the minister's house to rescue the letter. His deception here is that he creates a disturbance: "a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard" (99) so that he misleads the minister and takes the letter replacing it with another decoy letter. Thirdly, Dupin had already solved the mystery of the stolen letter, however, the minister realized that the letter was not the original since Dupin has written something in it, as it becomes clear: "Why-it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank-that would have been insulting-" (100). Thus, Dupin is again a hero for having managed to solve the mystery of the stolen letter. In all three stories, Dupin is placed in a superior position because of his intelligence and his ingenious use of reason. On the contrary, the police cannot give a solution to resolve the crime and the mystery of the purloined letter. Throughout

the three stories, the police need Dupin's help in order to find a solution and thus, Dupin is shown to be a particularly capable thinking machine.

## 2. THE DUALITY BETWEEN THE DETECTIVE AND THE READER.

This second idea concerns the issue of duality between the detective and the reader, because "the references to past events allow the reader to infer the motivation for the speaker's utterance and present actions, the reader of detective fiction is simulated to discover the causal links between events and their results" (Martens 201). Thus, the reader can interpret the actions that the detective follows in order to find a solution to the mysteries and the crimes. Through Dupin's explanations throughout the three short stories, the reader can follow them, become involved and attempt to solve the crimes, although by the end of each story, the reader may not be able to solve the mystery as Dupin does.

In "The Murders of the Rue Morgue", after the police fail to find any evidence related to the perpetrator of the murder of two women, M. Dupin conducts a magnificent investigation which allows him to offer the following brilliant explanation: "If the thief had taken any, why did he not take the best- why did he not take all?" (25) ". . . A madman . . . has done this deed [ . . . ] these marks were made by no human hand" (27, 28). What is relevant in this quotation is how Dupin resolves the crimes by explaining that the criminal must have been an animal because of the horrible force used in the murders and the strange voices that were heard as the crimes occurred. In addition, this narrative mechanism through reasoned explanations allows the reader to immerse himself in the story. For instance, after analysing the crime scenario, Dupin carries out an analysis of who the killer could be and he exclaims; "There are two windows in the chamber. One of them is unobstructed by furniture, and is wholly visible. The lower portion of the

other is hidden from view by the head of the unwieldy bedstead which is thrust close up against it” (22). This kind of explanations allows the reader to analyse and try to reach the solution. Furthermore, Dupin's capacity for reasoning can be seen as analytical, since the solutions reveal the most important powers of the mind. This idea is perfectly explained by Rosenheim, who defends that “human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve” (377) [and therefore], “the particular ability needed to resolve such a puzzle is the analytic” (377). The reader can carry out the investigation along with the detective, however, the fact that it requires a unique power of the mind to deduce who is the murderer, which only Dupin has, it creates an unexpected turn at the end of the story, creating a mysterious environment, in which the reader is unable to figure out the solution because the reader is not expecting at any time that the killer is an animal.

It is not only in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” that the duality between the reader and the detective is shown, but it is also evident in the short story “The Mystery of Marie Roget”. From the beginning of the story the reader can follow the same information received by Dupin and the narrator through Poe’s narrative style:

The reader follows the narrative of the story of investigation, in which the detective tries to discover the story of the crime from clues, until the detective is finally able to reconstruct it in its entirety up to its endpoint, the crime, which also marks the start of the story of the investigation (Martens 201).

The reader can follow the investigation through a report made by the narrator and based on testimonies in which the most important clues are revealed, “Marie Roget left the residence of her mother . . . about nine o’clock in the morning of Sunday, June” (42). “The face was suffused with dark blood, some of which issued from the mouth” (43). “The editor here proceeds to argue the body must have been

in the water” (45). “The lover and intended husband of Marie, . . . deposes that he did not hear of the discovery of the body until next morning” (46). All this information helps the reader to follow the crime and therefore, to search for a solution. The reader’s guesses could be compared with Dupin’s because both the reader and the detective have intuition. However, Dupin always moves to the reader when revealing the mystery because we read the solution in Dupin’s stream of thoughts. All of his guesses make perfect sense due to his ability to analyse the crimes with his thinking, and his analytical and rational powers. This idea is strongly defended by Martens: “Dupin’s recounting of his reasoning as it leads to the solution of the mystery . . . the readers base their trust in the superior insight of the detective” (204).

In addition, “The Purloined Letter” has the same duality between the detective and the reader. However, in this short story, Poe goes beyond since he uses psychological analysis through the use of new devices in Dupin’s strategy of tricking the man who he considers to be the suspect, which is not told to the reader until the final explanation and therefore, in omitting this trick the reader can only intuit, but not solve the mystery. In the words of Flower: “the analytic detective story focuses not merely on the investigation process and all its acts of analysis but on the analysis of those acts of analysis. Such a story invites, or rather necessitates, an investigation of the investigator and his methods (156)”. Thus, in this story, the “analysis of those acts of analysis” and the “investigation of the investigator” are depicted in the story, since police cannot find the letter despite having searched in every place in the Minister’s house, however, Dupin knows that “the mystery is a little too plain” (84). Therefore, the reader and the detective present a duality because their final intention is the same, to solve the mystery. However, the fact that

it requires a great power of the mind by analysing and investigating beyond the superficial things, creates an unexpected turn in the sense that when Dupin finds the letter, the reader is unable to figure out the solution. Therefore, it could be said that in these three short stories the duality established between the reader and the detective is represented throughout Dupin's explanations, which the reader can interpret in order to intuit the solution for the crimes and the mysteries. However, in all of the three stories, Dupin goes beyond the reader, he possesses a special mind power that allows him to find the solution; he uses analytical reasoning.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, throughout this dissertation I have aimed to explore the relevance of the figure of Dupin as a detective, since Poe invented the detective fiction when he published the short story "The Murder in Rue Morgue". In addition, this paper has analysed the element that the Dupin Trilogy; "The Murders in Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter" have in common: the detective. This figure's reasoning method is examined in addition to how this detective creates a duality with the reader when seeking a solution to the mysteries. On the one hand, Dupin presents himself as a thinking machine who is capable of solving every case, however, what is different in the three stories is the way in which he resolves each one. In "The Murders in Rue Morgue", Dupin is able to find the solution for the two murders in a closed room; in "The Mystery of Marie Roget", he analyses the clues from a newspaper, and the most extraordinary aspect is that he does not go to the place in which the crime was committed. In "The Purloined Letter", although he uses his analytical and reasoning method as in the other two stories, he employs psychological deception, since once he finds the

stolen letter, he makes the minister believe that there is a shot outside his house in order to replace the letter with one written by him. All these facts place Dupin in a superior intellectual position while the police are depicted as inept and unable to find a solution for the mysteries. On the other hand, the reader and the detective have the same interest – to search for a solution- for that reason, there is a duality between them. The reader becomes involved in solving the mystery thanks Dupin's explanations through clues which enable the reader share his motivation to find the solution.

## Works cited

- Bandy, W. T. "Who Was Monsieur Dupin?" *PMLA*, vol. 79, no. 4, 1964, pp. 509–510. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/460757](http://www.jstor.org/stable/460757).
- Bennet, Maurice J. "The Detective Fiction of Poe and Borges". *Comparative Literature*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1983, pp. 262–275. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1770621](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1770621).
- Flower, Dean. "Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story: "the Mystery to a Solution," by John T. Irwin (Book Review)." *The Hudson Review*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1995, pp. 153. ProQuest, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.usal.es/docview/1296570603?accountid=17252>.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. "The Limits of Reason: Poe's Deluded Detectives." *American Literature*, vol. 47, no. 2, 1975, pp. 184–196. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2925480](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2925480).
- Martens, Britta. "Dramatic Monologue, Detective Fiction, and the Search for Meaning." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2011, pp. 195–218. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2011.66.2.195](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2011.66.2.195).
- Poe, A. Edgar. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Edited and with an Introduction by Matthew Pearl. The Modern Library New York, 2006. <http://www.matthewpearl.com/assets/final.draft.murders.pdf>.
- Rosenheim, Shawn. "'The King of 'Secret Readers'": Edgar Poe, Cryptography, and the Origins of the Detective Story." *ELH*, vol. 56, no. 2, 1989, pp. 375–400. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2873064](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873064).
- Sparling, Tawnee, "Rationalism and Romanticism in Detective Fiction". Duke University, vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, pp. 201-208. PDF. <http://andererseits.library.duke.edu/article/view/13311/2341>.

