

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

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review: starting points

- ▶ problem of popular genre
 - ▶ can't get no respect
 - ▶ too commercial, too formulaic, too fun
 - ▶ not serious
- ▶ how to take it seriously?
 - ▶ themes: crime, guilt, justice, motive, social order
 - ▶ form: plots, puzzles
 - ▶ could be subversive (?)
- ▶ do we have to?

Poe warm-up

- ▶ Write: who committed the murders in the Rue Morgue? Write a few sentences about whether you think the resolution is satisfying and why.

motive (for detection)

[Dupin:] “As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement,” [I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing] “and, besides, Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful.” (132)

relatable hero

At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. (120)

keeping it real

“It is not too much to say that neither of us believe in præternatural events. Madame and Mademoiselle L’Esapanaye were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially. Then how?” (136)

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“It is my design to show you, first, that the thing [getting down on the lightning rod] might possibly have been accomplished:—but, secondly and *chiefly*, I wish to impress upon your understanding the very *extraordinary*—the almost *præternatural* character of that agility which could have accomplished it.” (140)

Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it [the orangutan] was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet.
(148)

colonial haunting

He [the sailor] had lately made a voyage to the Indian Archipelago....After great trouble, occasioned by the intractable ferocity of his captive during the home voyage, he at length succeeded in lodging it safely at his own residen in Paris....His ultimate design was to sell it. (148)

It was subsequently caught by the owner himself. (150)

what kind of story?

The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. (116)

The three tales before the last, are “Murders in the Rue Morgue”—“Mystery of Marie Roget”—and “The Purloined Letter.” They are all of the same class—a class peculiar to Mr. Poe. They are inductive—tales of ratiocination—of profound and searching analysis.

The incidents in the “Murder in the Rue Morgue” are purely imaginary. Like all the rest, it is written backwards.

[Poe?], review of Edgar A. Poe, *Tales, Aristidean* 1, no. 4 (October 1945), 318–19, *American Periodicals Series*.

ratiocination?

Let it not be supposed, from what I have just said, that I am detailing any mystery, or penning any romance. What I have described in the Frenchman, was merely the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased intelligence. (121)

“Dupin,” said I, gravely, “this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of ——?” Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.

——“of Chantilly,” said he. (121)

discussion

- ▶ How does “analysis” succeed in this story? What does Dupin do, and what does Poe do?
 - ▶ find passages to help you figure this out

“The larger links of the chain run thus—Chantilly, Orion, Dr. Nichols, Epicurus, Stereotomy, the street stones, the fruiterer.” (122)

“He will reason thus:—‘I am innocent; I am poor...I will answer the advertisement, get the Ourang-Outang, and keep it close until this matter has blown over.’”

At this moment we heard a step upon the stairs. (145)

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“If now, in addition to all these things, you have properly reflected upon the odd disorder of the chamber, we have gone so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations...What result, then, has ensued? What impression have I made upon your fancy?”...

“A madman,” I said, has done this deed (142)

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next

- ▶ two Conan Doyle stories on Canvas
- ▶ focus especially on “A Scandal in Bohemia” (print out)