
THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE – A TALE OF RATIOCINATION

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Abstract: The objective of the present paper is to study Poe's – 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' as a tale of ratiocination. Edgar Allan Poe has been the centre of much scholarly discussion and critical attention. He is universally recognised as the father of the detective story. He was the first to perceive the literary possibilities of detective form. The five stories – 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', 'The Mystery of Marie Roget', 'The Purloined Letter', 'Thou Art The Man' and 'The gold Bug' are classified as Tales of Ratiocination. Poe published his 'Analytic Stories', from 1841 – 1845 which he called as 'tales of ratiocination'. The term 'ratiocination' has been employed to describe his tales of the order of the 'Purloined Letter', 'the Murders in the Rue Morgue' and 'The gold Bug'. A ratiocinative or detective tale can be defined as a story characterised by a process of reasoning. 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' is the first detective story.

Key words: Analytic stories, Process of reasoning, Ratiocination, Critical attention.

Introduction: We are regularly told that Poe invented the detective story. His ground breaking "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", its less well known sequel "The Mystery of Marie Roget", and the trilogy's celebrated conclusion "The purloined Letter" achieved much popularity for him. They are well known for their ingenious solutions of puzzles. A.E. Murch explains the detective story as "a tale in which the primary interest lies in the methodical discovery, by rational means, of the exact circumstances of a mysterious event or series of events"¹. The element of curiosity is the focal point in a ratiocinative tale. In a ratiocinative tale the plot is primary in importance: incident, character and action are subordinate to it. According to Edgar Allan Poe in a ratiocinative tale, "every point is so arranged as to perplex the reader and to what his desire for elucidation".

Vincent Burauelli enumerates three elements necessary for the success of a ratiocinative tale – crime, the detective and the method of detection. The success of the author resides in the convincing unity of these three elements – the greater the fusion, the greater is the success². The crime is the moving force, the reason of the story. If there is no crime worth unravelling the second element, does not become operative. The third element is a corollary of the second. The success of the tale depends on the method of detection.

Scholars have discovered that Poe was the pioneer of new genre of fictions called the detective tales, which Poe called the tales of ratiocination. Such scholars trace the origin of detective heroes such as Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown of our days in Monsieur Dupin of Poe's creation. The development of the detective in the hands of Poe has been elaborately studied by scholars and critics of eminence such as T.S. Eliot who has analyzed Poe, the detective³.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue begins with the narrator describing

his first encounter with Dupin "at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume brought us into closer communion"⁴. The search for an elusive text becomes a metaphor here for detection which suggests how the investigator is not only a reader but also a figurative writer seeking possession of a hidden story. The same story is gradually uncovered by Dupin, whose power is signalled by the way his voice takes over the narration, which fills the disturbing space of mystery with explanation. In this tale Dupin alludes to his linguistic powers by suggesting how the complete story can be fashioned from a few fragments: "upon these two words (Mon Dick!) I have mainly built my hopes of a full solution of the riddle!"⁵.

The same story illustrated his skill with words as he pens the advertisements, a tactic that, in luring the sailor to Dupin's home, suggests his narrative control over the characters in the case. Dupin assures the sailor – "you have done nothing which you could have avoided – nothing certainly which renders you culpable"⁶. This makes us suspect the detective's strategy of re-establishing society's innocence so completely that no one or nothing is declared guilty. In the beginning of the story it is also described how Dupin and the narrator become recluses in protesting their privacy and where the ostensible crime occurs as a violation of the personal space of the home, threats to personal autonomy would seem to demand special attention. But Dupin in a solution that writes the planned crime as a mere accident, seems to evade the issue, which in terms parallels the detective's own pleasurable intrusions into the minds of those he investigates. Dupin boasts – "that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms"⁷ – suggestively aligns his trespassing upon private space with the orangutan's more visible and physically

violent expression of power as it passes through a literal window. Dupin's ability to read the city's inhabitants, to occupy their mind prospective, reflects not only his brilliance as a detective but also the threat he poses to others independence. Dupin lures the sailor to his chambers and locks the door. He arms himself with a pistol. He takes physical possession of the sailor; but by extorting his confession, his secret story, the authorial Dupin also assumes proprietor – ship of his individual, who now functions as his character. To construct his case, Dupin extends the bounds of his authority and of his narrative. He tells the story of his companion of the sailor or even of his rival, whom Dupin defeats “in his own castle”, in the language of unsurprising territory.

Dupin captures the orangutan, obscuring the sailor's mistreatment of it. He removes it from its place, imprisons it in Paris and attempts to subdue it with a whip. He obscures his own oppressive use of power. What the sailor's confession suggests and what Dupin seems reluctant to highlight is the connection between power and violence. Dupin depicts the horrific killings as an accident. But Poe's tale denies the individual space and thus autonomy of the orangutan. The sailor constructs his association with the animal as a relationship, like Dupin's, between the dominator and the dominated.

The sailor's attempt to define the place of the orangutan by confining it to a “Closet” exists the resistance of the animal. The animal takes over the private space of the sailor's bedroom and assumes his activity of shaving. As he is displaced by the animal, the sailor struggles to regain mastery by producing his whip. The animal flees pursued by its owner. The sailor's controlling conduct results in the orangutan's invasion of the L'Españayes' home. It is not surprising that the orangutan seeks to evade the re-imposition of the sailor's power. Deprived of a home of its own, it seeks an alternative refuge. As an animal of wild ferocity it displays that violent disregard for personal boundaries exhibited by its master. Although the sailor is “innocent of the atrocities in the Rue Morgue”⁸ Dupin declares that the sailor bears some responsibility. It is true that Dupin hopes to conceal in crafting his solution and, a favourable representation of himself.

Conclusion: Poe's genius has been elaborately touched upon. His attitude to literature has motivated the scholars to think that they should begin their work with a study of his genius. Such studies repeatedly confirm that Poe is not mere a story teller but that he is a genius. Extensive studies revealed that Poe's genius finds expression in various forms such as Poe, the Epicurean, Poe, the revolutionist, and Poe, the builder of tradition.

References:

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