

EDGAR ALLAN POE AS A WRITER OF DETECTIVE FICTION

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ABSTRACT:

*Edgar Allan Poe is a well-known personality in the arena of literature especially in the world of Detective Fiction. Edgar Allan Poe has got the status of being the father of detective fiction because his *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* has been considered as a model of detective stories. There have been some stories that have also been a topic for discussion for being the blueprint of detective fiction but the scientific structure and method used in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* are used by the first time which made it a perfect example. After the arrival of this story, a lot of writers tried their hands at this sub-genre including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. Though Poe has written crime stories too but he didn't portray any detective in these stories and that's they are not considered as detective stories. The main highlight in Poe's detective fiction is his hero, C. Auguste Dupin, who is an amateur Parisian detective. The other two detective stories of Poe are *The Mystery of Marié Rogêt*, and *The Purloined Letter*. Detective fiction came as a new leaf in the field of literature and readers became fan of detective stories. Since the beginning of its arrival, detective fiction has always seen popularity.*

Keywords: *Detective Fiction, Edgar Allan Poe, Agatha Christie, detectives.*

INTRODUCTION:

Detective fiction is one of the newest genres in the field of literature. It comes under the category of mystery and crime fiction. In this genre, the lead character is the detective and he/she is the one who solves the mystery. The detective character can be an amateur or professional. The detective tackles the case and achieves success in disclosing the true identity of the criminal. The type of crime can be anything such as murder/murders, theft, rape, or anything else. One of the most prominent features about detective fiction is, it makes the mind of the readers shaper. It provides them an opportunity to enter their mind inside the story so that they can solve the case. Directly or indirectly, it makes the readers a temporary detective. Detective fiction contains suspenseful elements and because of this element, it doesn't allow the readers to detect themselves from the story. Since the beginning to the end, readers couldn't take their eyes and mind off the book. It makes their thought process quicker by sharpening the edge of their thoughts. Detective fiction spread awareness amongst the readers so that they can take more precaution and save themselves from the crimes. It makes them enable to understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong, and what exactly they must do when they face the state of dilemma.

Edgar Allan Poe is an American writer of the nineteenth-century who is considered as one of the most important literary figures of the Dark American Romanticism. He tried his hands in so many form of literature and provided the modern structure to short stories. His themes are mostly dark. He also gave perfection to detective fiction and published three detective short stories: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), *The Mystery of Mary Rogêt* (1843) and *The Purloined Letter* (1844). Poe's detective fiction has all the needed requirements; it has a skilled detective character, an interestingly good plot, superb suspense to attract and bind the readers around his stories, and most importantly a shocking ending. The highlight of any detective story is its detective. Edgar Allan Poe gave birth to a fictional detective character who is considered as the source of later detective characters. Poe named him C. Auguste Dupin. When Poe produced this character, the term 'detective' was not even coined. The meaning of the word Dupin is Dupe or deception. Dupin is a Parisian amateur detective and the most powerful feature of his personality is the way his brain processes things. He is a detective by choice and he does the work of detection out of his affection towards it.

Poe called his detective short stories as 'tales of ratiocination'. Ratiocination is the technique that Dupin uses to solve the cases. This technique has some basic elements such as detection, reasoning, deduction, and logic. Dupin observes the crime spot as the prior thing. He considers the crime spot as the main clue which can lead a good investigator to the perpetrator. And a good detective must observe the crime spot so carefully and minutely if he/she wants to get the clue(s). Since observation is Dupin's main weapon, he thinks from all the sides. He gives importance to each and every thing and considers the possibility of everything as well. He doesn't leave anything because anything can lead him to the culprit. He adopts this technique in all his cases. After observing the crime spot, he excludes all the impossibility and unwanted elements, and fixes his mind to the facts. This method is called as deduction. Deduction is not for everyone. And not everyone can do it as good as Dupin does. Intelligence doesn't mean to collect the facts, it's also about deducting the unwanted things so that one would get chance to focus on the important things only in order to move into the right path. According to Dupin, every murderer has a motive, so he tries to probe into the psychology behind of the criminal and the motive behind the crime as well to reach at the ultimate conclusion. In *The Murder in the Rue Morgue*, he collected the nail and grey hair as clues on the murder spot where a mother and daughter were brutally murdered. Along with the other clues, he comes to the final conclusion that the murder was not committed by any human being rather it was an orangutan who murdered them. In *The Mystery of Mary Rogêt*, he also uses the same technique but in this story he doesn't have much liberty as it was based on the real murder mystery of Mary Cecilia Rogers whose dead body was found floating down the Hudson River in Hoboken, New Jersey. In *The Purloined Letter*, Dupin finds the stolen letter. He uses his imaginative skill and provides a very fresh idea that the person who has stolen the letter must have hidden it at a place that is expected and not unexpected. Dupin runs on the idea that to catch a criminal, one must think like a criminal too. This is pure psychology and it makes Dupin a great mentalist. Because of Edgar Allan Poe, 'Whodunit' and 'locked-room mystery' fiction built them up powerfully in the field of detective fiction. Whodunit means who has done it and it is quite traditional in the arena of detective story.

Poe's invention has showed the path to many writers. His detective character, Dupin gave inspiration for the creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Dashiell Hammond's Sam Spade etc. Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot are the most famous detective characters in the history of detective fiction. And they are inspired by Dupin's character. They don't only think and work like Dupin but they

also have a sidekick just like Dupin has. Dupin's sidekick is unnamed and he is the one Who introduced Dupin in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. He says:

I was astonished, too, at The vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild Fervor, and the vivid freshness of his imagination. Seeking in Paris the objects I then sought, I Felt that the society of such a man would be to me a treasure beyond price; and this feeling I Frankly confided to him."¹

Edgar Allan Poe is the one who used psychology in this field. He is able to understand human psychology quite well. Poe wrote *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* with the elaboration of human psychology. The narrator (the unnamed sidekick/friend of Dupin) says:

The Analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is Necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man often remarkably incapable of analysis. The Constructive or combining power, by which ingenuity is usually manifested, and which phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a separate organ, supposing it a primitive Faculty, has been so frequently seen in those intellect bordered otherwise upon idiocy... It Will found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the truly imaginative never Otherwise than analytic.

A detective must be an analyst too. He/she must know how to analyse the case. They should have the intellect of a psychologist. And that's the reason Poe decided to provide the details of the features of a detective so that the readers would be able to understand the technique implied by Dupin. Poe gave the perfect and scientific format of detective fiction. And that what makes him the father of this genre.

The early nineteenth-century had the influence of Enlightenment. Gothic literature was quite popular amongst the readers. The scientific and industrial revolution started in the eighteenth century, spread their wings wider in the nineteenth century. More scientific theories were proposed. Writers of gothic fiction used these theories and modes of reasoning in their literary works. People of this era were fascinated by the horror. This fascination shifted in the Victorian era too. Gothic, crime, and mystery became a subject of strong interest amongst the people that resulted in the fascination towards the literature of the same genre as well. Writers kept writing in the Victorian Gothic era about fear, anxieties, and societal tension. The knowledge gained by the development of science, criminology, and criminal justice were amalgamated together. These elements are persistent in the works of Edgar Allan Poe. All his stories of 'ratiocination'- both detective stories, and mystery and horror stories are still very famous. There is investigative skill in the narration of the narrator imbibed with the methods of observation and interpretation. The way the narrator narrates the story gives the readers the details about the mystery of the story. Horror and reasoning are linked in the stories of Poe. There is a difference between Gothic fiction and detective fiction in terms of its style and form; but Poe amalgamated both of them in a very logical manner. He didn't only made the readers fearful because of the horror elements in his stories but he also removed their fear with reasons and logic. Fear of unknown was removed by the revelation of truth. Before producing detective stories Poe was quite famous for his Gothic fiction. He moulded his Gothic and crime fiction, and transformed them into a new form i.e., detective fiction. Scientific reasoning and the evolution of law enforcement are prominent in his stories. They are amalgamated with the elements of 'horror', 'terror', 'grotesque', and 'arabesque'. He made his stories more scientific with psychology which modernized his stories as well. With proper logic and reasoning, detective fiction cannot stand. The motive behind any crime must be digested by the readers. It is the logic that leads the

detective to the culprit. In all his detective stories, Poe gives logic for committing the crimes. His detective character, C. Auguste Dupin, uses his logical imagination to understand the motive for the murder. The clues that he found on the murder spot in *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* were not the only thing that led him to the murderer but also his logical imagination. Dupin was able to see what no one could notice because he gave priority to all the things that were present on the crime spot.

CONCLUSION:

Poe's short stories can be divided into two categories- horror fiction and detective fiction. In his horror fiction, readers could see the characters who are the preys of alienation, lunacy, fear and terror. They have a touch of supernatural elements as well. One of his most famous short stories *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843), revolves around a murderer who is overshadowed by his own heart. It finally leads him to confess his sins. In *The Black Cat* (1843), Poe portrayed the character of a murderer who was obsessed with the idea of killing his own cat. *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846) presents a narrator who wanted to bury his rival alive in a brick tomb as his rival injured his heart so many times. The idea of murdering the victim is presented in a brutal way. Readers could sense the hatred of the narrator that lies in his heart. Thus, the desire of murdering the victims in his horror fiction is the product of some sort of psychological desire which is totally different from the motive of the murderer in his detective fiction. Among all the three detective stories of Poe's, only *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* depicted murders as the ultimate crime. The motive of the murderer was not the product of any hatred or any sort of obsession but it was fear. It wasn't even planned murders. The orangutan killed the mother and the daughter out of fear and it was a spontaneous decision; more accurately, it was an impulsive decision that the orangutan took desperately. In this manner, Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is quite different from other detective stories that came later on. The portrayal of the murders have been pre-planned; though the motive dependent on so many reasons. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie- one of the most famous writers of the detective fiction always portrayed murders as the product of self satisfactory beneficiary motives. However, the path of writing detective fiction for them was also paved by Edgar Allan Poe. One thing that was quite original in the literary field was the arrival of a detective. The portrayal of crime has always been there in literature but the presence of a detective was missing. Poe provided a 'man' who was ahead the police department. In other words he was capable of solving the crimes that seemed impossible to be solved. He was even able to provide logical solution for a crime that had been unsolved in the real world. Poe chose a real life murder mystery in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* which remained unsolved because of the lack of evidence and proper analytical approach. But Dupin provided logical conclusion in the end of the story that hadn't been considered by the police department. The tussle between the detective and the police department has been a popular tool in the detective fiction to show the superiority of the detective over the capability of the police department.

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