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The Ingenious Narrator of Poe's Dupin Mysteries

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
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## ABSTRACT

### The Ingenious Narrator of Poe's Dupin Mysteries

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Scholarship on Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin stories consistently focuses on the stories' influence on the genre of detective fiction. One of the foundational genre elements pioneered by Poe in these tales is the sidekick/narrator. Throughout detective fiction, the less-intelligent sidekick has become a standard fixture, a convenient trope in foregrounding the brilliant machinations of the detective's mind. The attention the literature gives to the narrator of the Dupin tales is almost universally in terms of the sidekick/narrator figure as a trope of detective fiction; in this way, it seems that Dupin's companion has come to be read in terms of what he has in common with his successors, the Watsons and Archie Goodwins of mystery stories, rather than more strictly on the terms of what makes him unique. This thesis examines the ways in which the narrator alternately highlights (in subtle ways) and attempts to obfuscate (in equally subtle ways) his role as the fictional author of the tales. The narrator's role as writer complicates the reading of Dupin as the autonomous master of his own narrative, and as the narrator himself as a generic, dim-witted sidekick. In this way, Dupin and the narrator occupy flip sides of the same narrative coin—Dupin serves as the showman, and the narrator, the invisible author. As contrasting, complementary doubles of one another, they perform the function of collaborative authors, each one equally essential to the production of the tales. Similarly, this reevaluation of the narrator/sidekick as an author figure brings out ways in which the narrator's genius parallels and matches the genius of Dupin.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, detective fiction, Dupin, narrator

Table of Contents

The Ingenious Narrator .....1  
Works Cited.....19

### The Ingenious Narrator

Perhaps the most consistent thread in Dupin criticism is the study of the stories' influence on the genre of detective fiction. Surveys of detective fiction such as Murch's *The Development of the Detective Novel* or Rzepka's *Detective Fiction* cite Poe's detective stories as key foundational texts in the genre. One of the foundational elements pioneered by Poe is the sidekick/narrator. Throughout the detective genre, the less-intelligent sidekick has become a standard fixture, a convenient trope in foregrounding the brilliant machinations of the detective's mind. In Rzepka's *Detective Fiction*, Poe's sidekick/narrator figure is examined mainly in his function as useful narrative device, "keeping them [readers] at a distance from the immediate observations and conclusions of his detective hero and unobtrusively controlling, through delay and proper sequencing, access to information crucial to solving the crime" (77). Similarly, in his *An Introduction to the Detective Story*, Panek states that in the Dupin mysteries, "Poe invents the limited narrator, whose main job is to ignore the critical, to state the obvious, and to advertise to us the unapproachable genius of the detective" (27). In addition to being less intelligent than the detective, the sidekick is also often less intelligent than the average reader. As Martin A. Kayman states in regard to Conan Doyle's Watson character, "it is reassuring to find, for example, that, although we may not be as bright as Holmes, we are at least smarter than his colleague" (49). It is through this lens that the narrator of the Dupin tales is most often viewed.

The attention these books, and others like them, give to the narrator of the Dupin tales is almost universally in terms of the sidekick/narrator figure as a trope of detective fiction; in this way, it seems that Dupin's companion has come to be read in terms of what he has in common with his successors, the Watsons and Archie Goodwins of mystery stories, rather than more strictly on the terms of what makes him unique.

However, just as Dupin can be productively reexamined by reading the tales that feature him without the “retrospective preconceptions” that come from the context of later detective fiction (Kayman 44), a similar rereading of the narrator of the Dupin tales is also productive; although the sidekick trope has its roots in the Dupin mysteries, Poe’s sidekick character manifests characteristics that set him apart from his fictional progeny.

On the surface, of course, the narrator/sidekick of these stories is by far the less interesting subject. As a character, he mainly acts as an audience to Dupin’s flamboyant performances. However, as a narrator, he serves a much more interesting function. Early in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the narrator explains that because he is better off financially than Dupin, he is “permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion” (532). The narrator as a character provides the physical means to house Dupin. As a narrator, he performs a similar function. By creating these written records of the feats of Dupin, the narrator “houses,” or embodies, the illustrious detective. At the beginning of both “The Mystery of Marie Roget” and “The Purloined Letter,” the narrator explicitly reminds the reader of the published accounts that he has written of his adventures with Dupin; he states, “in an article entitled ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’ I endeavored, about a year ago, to depict some very remarkable features in the mental character of my friend, the Chevalier C. August Dupin” (Poe “Marie” 724). In making this move, Poe establishes Dupin’s companion as being not only the narrator of the tales, but also their fictional author. Throughout the three Dupin mysteries, the narrator alternately highlights (in subtle ways) and attempts to obfuscate (in equally subtle ways) his role as the fictional author of the tales. The narrator’s role as writer complicates the reading of Dupin as the autonomous master of his own narrative. In this way, Dupin and the narrator occupy flip sides of the same

narrative coin—Dupin serves as the showman, and the narrator, the invisible author. As contrasting, complementary doubles of one another, they perform the function of collaborative authors, each one equally essential to the production of the tales.

The motif of doubles is popular throughout Poe's fiction, from the two William Wilsons, to Madeline and Roderick Usher. Derrida once referred to "The Purloined Letter" as a "labyrinth of doubles" (qtd. in Rollason 16). The most obvious of these doubles is Dupin and the Minister D---; however, scholars have pointed out various other doubles in the Dupin mysteries, including the sailor and the orangutan (Rollason 8) and the narrator as a double of Dupin. Derrida reads the existence of doubles as a means to defer signification in the narratives (6). Peter Thoms speculates that Dupin may view the narrator as being a rival (49). Ffrangcon C. Lewis points out that the narrator actually shares many characteristics with Dupin, such as an interest in the same rare books and a love of the dark (99-100) and that "the spiritual connotations of their friendship, 'or communion,' are heavily underscored, as the narrator seems to experience an almost numinous shock of recognition" (100). Further, although the narrator refers to his relationship with Dupin in fairly equal terms, there is also "an odd combination of mutuality and submission in his friendship with Dupin" (100). Although they acknowledge the similarities between the two, none of these readings acknowledge the possibilities of the narrator being a double of equal narrative significance with Dupin himself; he is consistently read as being an inferior foil. Considering the nature of doubles—two characters that are, almost by definition, equally important—this is a strange oversight.

It is not difficult to see why the significance of the narrator is overlooked in these readings—as a character, the narrator comes across as being of average intelligence, at best. He is always several steps behind Dupin in the solving of the mysteries and requires elaborate

explanations from the detective. In reacting to the bizarre murders in the Rue Morgue, the narrator states “I could merely agree with all Paris in considering them an insoluble mystery” (544). However, in the Dupin stories, it is essential to differentiate between the narrator as an actor within the story, and the narrator as the fictional writer of the story. Seen in this light, the narrator as an actor is a narrative construct created by the narrator as fictional author. A clever narrator would see the value of downplaying his own intelligence as a character for the purpose of narrative effectiveness. Hence, the intelligence of the narrator as writer should not be so readily conflated with the intelligence of the narrator as sidekick. In fact, as will be demonstrated later, the ineptitude of the narrator character within the stories ultimately highlights the genius of the narrator character as fictional author. Throughout the stories, the narrator as author makes several moves that subtly underscore his own analytic genius, a genius that he employs in his role as fictional co-author of the Dupin mysteries. Where Dupin supplies a large chunk of the text of each story with his flair for dramatically explaining the solutions to the mysteries that he investigates, the narrator uses a similar genius to frame these solutions to make a complete, compelling story. In this way, Dupin and the unnamed narrator act as fictional co-authors of the tales.

The narrator provides a definition of analytic genius that applies both to Dupin and himself in the lengthy preamble to the narrative events of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” The preface serves as a kind of minor treatise on genius. On the surface, the miniature treatise (which the narrator claims is not a treatise) seems to be referring only to Dupin. And while most of the assertions that the narrator makes in praise of the analytic mind do apply to Dupin’s particular skills, others patently do not. In this preface, the narrator states that “the higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully tasked by the unostentatious



game of draughts than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess” (528). In light of Dupin’s consistent theatricality, marked by both its elaborateness and its frivolity, this privileging of the unostentatious suggests that the narrator is not referring solely to Dupin’s genius in this preamble to the tale, but also, subtly, to his own.

Another statement made near the beginning of the story supports the reading of the narrator as an analytic genius; after the narrator explains that analytic minds are best appreciated through their effects, he claims that “his [the analyst’s] results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition” (528), or in other words, although analysts work by systematic means, the results of their analysis appear to observers to be produced effortlessly. On one level, this aptly describes Dupin. Because Dupin never explains himself to anyone besides the narrator, the result of his efforts in solving, for example, the murders in the Rue Morgue is “regarded as little less than miraculous” (Poe “Marie” 725) by those who have not heard Dupin’s explanation of his methods. However, neither the narrator nor the reader of the story falls into the category of the uninitiated. The bulk of each of the three Dupin stories is devoted to Dupin’s elaborate explanations of the methods behind his genius. Because of the narrator, to the reader, Dupin’s methods have the appearance of method rather than of intuition. That description of apparent intuition, then, applies more to a hypothetical Dupin that exists outside the stories than to the obviously methodical character created for the stories.

On another level, the underlying method-versus-apparent-intuition claim serves as a fitting description of the narrator’s function in the tales. As stated earlier, the narrator is also the fictional writer of the Dupin mysteries, and the narrative decisions he makes stand in marked contrast to Dupin’s theatrical narrative style. As mentioned earlier, the narrator provides the

physical means to house Dupin, not only providing the bare essentials, but also adding that, “I have said that the whims of my friend were manifold, and that *Je les menagais*” (Poe, “Rue Morgue” 547), or that he handles Dupin with kid gloves. He functions similarly as a narrator. The main purpose of the narrator’s stories is to draw attention away from their own constructed nature in order to keep the reader’s attention focused on Dupin and his methods. Later in the same preamble, for example, the narrator claims, “I am not now writing a treatise, but simply prefacing a somewhat peculiar narrative by observations very much at random” (528). With this statement, the narrator simultaneously calls attention to and attempts to negate the constructed nature of the narrative and the existence of any method on his part. Where Dupin goes to great lengths to reveal his methodology, the narrator seeks to deny or hide his own. This mirroring effect provides the contrast to make Dupin’s unique characteristics stand out even more blatantly.

A further implication of the narrator’s role in housing Dupin is the way that it calls into question Dupin’s own flair for the dramatic, or even the extent of his genius. Just as many critics note the ways in which Dupin’s monologues overtake the narrator’s own story, a closer look at the involvement of the narrator suggests the ways in which the narrator threatens to overshadow Dupin. By subtly calling attention to the constructed nature of the narrative, the narrator reminds the reader that the Dupin of the stories is also a construct, a narrative rendering of the actual Dupin. What we are given is the narrator’s/author’s version of the illustrious detective, a version that is tailored to suit the needs of the narrative. Dupin of the stories, then, becomes just as much a device as the non-genius sidekick. The actual Dupin may be as brilliant as the narrator/author makes him out to be, or his genius and flair for the dramatic may be enhanced for the purpose of

crafting a compelling narrative. In this way, the narrator overshadows Dupin to a degree comparable with which he is superficially overshadowed by Dupin within the narratives.

Another instance of mirroring is found in the contrasting narrative structures used by the narrator and Dupin. At the close of the preamble to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” the narrator transitions into the story by telling the reader that “the narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced” (531). As defined in the OED, a commentary is “anything that serves for exposition or illustration,” which is to say that an analysis of the events presented in the story should lead the reader to the same conclusions that the narrator expounds in the preamble. Poe scholar Paul Jahshan has pointed out the seeming backwardness of this structure—the readers are being given an analysis of a character and a situation that they have not yet read (80). The reader is given the findings and then the evidence (e.g. the claim at the beginning of “Rue Morgue” that Dupin is a genius, followed by the numerous examples of Dupin’s analytic genius throughout the story). This structure is also backwards in relation to Dupin’s method. In all three stories, the reader is presented with a situation for which there is seemingly no logical explanation. The reader is then given Dupin’s meticulous, step-by-step analysis of the situation and the solution to the problem. For example, in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Dupin walks the narrator step-by-step through the evidence before offering his conclusion, that the murders were committed by an escaped orangutan. The narrator’s analysis/situation structure serves as a counterpoint to Dupin’s situation/analysis structure. Once again, the narrator acts as a mirror, highlighting Dupin’s genius not through a lack of genius, but through a contrasting manifestation of it.

The narrator further mirrors Dupin in his excellent skills of analysis. The narrator is, by his own definition, just as much an analyst as Dupin. Whist, according to the narrator, is a good

example of a game suited to the skills of a truly great analyst (529-30). He states that most players will have a capable memory and a knowledge of the rules, but what gives the analyst the edge is “the necessary knowledge [...] of *what* to observe” (530, emphasis Poe’s). As Dupin investigates the various crimes that come to his attention, he exercises a certain economy of observation, examining only the details that he believes will lead to results. At the beginning of “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” the narrator refers to his account of the murders in the Rue Morgue as a depiction of the character of C. August Dupin (724). Reading the Dupin mysteries as such, the narrator uses a similar economy of detail in relaying his observation of his friend. He has a good sense of not only what to observe, but what to tell the reader to observe. Just as Dupin highlights his specific, precise observations to the narrator, the fictional writer of the Dupin mysteries highlights his own specific, precise observations to his readers.

Another analytic characteristic demonstrated by the narrator is his precise observation of human behavior. According to the narrator, another advantage that an analyst has in whist is the attention he pays to the other players: “he notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expressions of certainty, of surprise, of triumph, or of chagrin” (530). Dupin uses this skill masterfully, most notably in “The Purloined Letter,” employing his knowledge of human nature to obtain the title letter of the story. In fact he elaborates on this point with an illustration of his own, in which boys in a guessing game succeed when they are able to read their opponent’s intelligence (Poe, “Purloined” 984-85). As part of his character depiction of the detective, the narrator makes a habit of noting the physical expressions he uses to read Dupin. He points out that when Dupin explains his analysis, his manner “was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire

distinctness of the enunciation” (533). Throughout the Dupin mysteries, the narrator notes the physical manifestations of surprise, confusion, and awe in the other characters. In doing so, he reveals himself to be a careful observer and reporter of human behavior, a necessary skill in acting as co-author of the tales.

The narrator’s genius for understanding human behavior is also manifest in the way that he uses the fictional version of himself to anticipate the questions and concerns of his reading audience. As argued earlier, the ineptitude of the sidekick character actually functions as a clever device deliberately rendered by the narrator as author. As has been noted in the literature on the sidekick figure throughout detective fiction, these figures can “put questions to the detective without giving offence and then relate the answers to us” (Rzepka 77). The sidekicks act as an intermediary between the unapproachable genius of the detective and the curiosity of the reader; the genius of this device is in knowing what questions the reader will want answered and what aspects of the story require a further explanation from the detective. In the Dupin mysteries, the narrator’s/sidekick’s preferred mode of eliciting information from Dupin is not direct questioning, but making incorrect, unintelligent statements and guesses that require correction by Dupin. Midway through Dupin’s soliloquy in “Rue Morgue,” for example, the narrator incorrectly guesses that “a madman [...] has done this deed—some raving maniac, escaped from a neighboring *Maison de Santé*” (558). This wrong guess anticipates what the reader may be thinking at this point and allows Dupin to directly address that thought. With the fact in mind that the sidekick as character is a construct of the narrator/author, it becomes clear that in knowing which guesses to have the sidekick make and which questions to ask, the narrator/author must possess that precise observation of human behavior to allow him to

anticipate the reactions of his readers, further supporting the ways in which his genius mirrors Dupin's.

This mirrored genius of Dupin and the narrator fits into a larger schema of symmetry throughout the Dupin mysteries. In *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries*, Richard Kopley builds on Richard Wilbur's argument, finding symmetry in repeated language—in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue he identifies “four pairs of corresponding language clusters framing the center” (Kopley 8). At the center of these language clusters, Kopley finds the word “nail,” significant because “the translation of the word ‘nail’ is the French ‘clou’—and so, the ‘clou’ is the ‘clew’” (10). He points out similar symmetries in the other two stories. For Kopley, the ultimate importance of this mirroring effect in the Dupin tales comes back to this quote from Poe's *Eureka*, that “the sense of the symmetrical is an instinct which may be depended on with an almost blindfold reliance. It is the poetical essence of the Universe—*of the Universe* which, in the supremeness of its symmetry, is but the most sublime of poems” (qtd. in Kopley 12). This presence of harmonic mirroring throughout the stories supports the reading of the narrator as a genius complementary to Dupin—with so much other symmetry, it stands to reason that the brilliance of the detective would be matched by the brilliance of another character, in this case the narrator.

Just as Dupin's success in solving the mystery of the Rue Morgue is mirrored by the narrator's success in creating an engaging tale in “The Murders of the Rue Morgue,” Dupin's failure to solve the murder of Marie Roget is paralleled by a similar failure on the narrator's part in creating a compelling narrative. Poe wrote “Marie Roget” in 1842 in response to the then-unsolved 1841 murder of a young woman, a “cigar girl” named Mary Rogers in New York City. The story thinly veils the real-life details of the case behind a Parisian setting and Parisian

characters, all of which correspond on a one-to-one basis with the real life players in the case. Unlike “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget” does not end with Dupin providing a satisfying solution for the baffling events he investigates.

Dupin’s first and largest failure is that the solution to the murder of Mary Rogers/Marie Roget that Poe/Dupin initially provided was proven incorrect. The story first appeared serially over the course of 1842 and 1843. Between that time and the time of a reprinting in 1845, a deathbed account from one of the case’s major players suggested that Mary Rogers died from an abortion attempt gone wrong (Kopley 45). Unfortunately for Poe, this account did not match the solution he provided in the initial printing of the story, and to reflect the new development in the case, Poe made several revisions to the 1845 reprinting that left room for the possibility that Rogers had died as a result of a failed abortion attempt, in addition to the theory he had initially proposed (45). The result is a narrative in which Dupin provides various solutions that might explain how Marie Roget was killed, but does not commit to any of them. In fact, in a note at the end of the story, Poe (or possibly the fictional narrator) makes the following baffling disclaimer:

But let it not be supposed that, in proceeding with the sad narrative of Marie from the epoch just mentioned, and in tracing the *denouement* the mystery which enshrouded her, it is my covert design to hint at an extension of the parallel, or even to suggest that the measures adopted in Paris for the discovery of the assassin of a grisette, or measures founded in any similar ratiocination, would produce any similar result. (Poe, “Marie” 772-73)

This note demonstrates a complete departure from the bravado of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”; instead of the attitude that ratiocination can solve any problem comes an

acknowledgement that in this case, it has failed, or at least should not be applied to solving an actual mystery. The note suggests that the story is meant as an entertainment and nothing more.

However, the narrator and fictional author of the tale mirrors Dupin's lapse in genius by creating a story that fails to entertain, that plods along for dozens of pages without creating a compelling narrative. The absence in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" of so many of the successful narrative elements of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter" underscore those elements' effectiveness and the narrator's authorial genius. Among the missing elements is the almost complete absence of the sidekick character in this tale. Within the story, then, there is nobody present to ask Dupin the right questions to steer the narrative into interesting territory, nobody to make inane guesses that require Dupin's condescending correction, nobody to observe the human behavior of Dupin and the other characters. This absence, and the corresponding failure of the story, once again call into question to what extent Dupin's genius and flair for narrative are his own, and to what extent they are created by the narrator.

Another question, raised not by "Marie Roget" specifically but by all three stories, is what the narrator's motivation might be in creating stories that build up Dupin so impressively, and simultaneously (on the surface at least) downplay the narrator's intelligence. What the evidence previously considered suggests is that the narrator/author is dedicated above all to the creation of compelling narrative. More so than any other popular genre, detective fiction concerns itself with the creation of narrative. A mysterious crime disrupts an orderly universe, and to set things right, the detective must produce a story that satisfactorily explains that disruption. Through the detective's investigations, then, the reader is presented with the story of the creation of a story. The three Dupin mysteries are no exception to detective fiction's general



concern with the production of narrative. The success of Dupin in solving the cases he tackles is manifest through the pages-long explanations he gives describing the exact circumstances by which the mysterious crimes were committed. In addition to his attention to the narratives' pragmatic function as explanations of previously unsolved crimes, Dupin also demonstrates interest in the dramatic effects of the stories he produces; at one point, he stops mid-soliloquy to ask his sidekick, "What impression have I made upon your fancy?" (Poe, "Morgue" 558). This concern is shared by the unnamed narrator, who not only preoccupies himself with the artistic aspects of the narratives he produces, but takes some trouble to point that preoccupation out to his reader. In this way, these three mystery stories concern themselves with the process of the production of literature, especially with the role and the characteristics of the one doing the producing. Read in this light, the Dupin mysteries, and more specifically the character of the narrator/fictional writer, become a commentary on the nature of authorship. The authorial motivations of the narrator are productively illuminated by, and sometimes serve to further illuminate, Edgar Allan Poe's real-life writing practices.

Through his fiction, Poe is both a flashy showman (much like Dupin) and a subtle craftsman (like the unnamed narrator). In "The Balloon Hoax," for example, Poe makes a showy, dramatic claim—that somebody had crossed the Atlantic Ocean by balloon in three days. This aspect of the hoax corresponds to Poe the showman, or the Dupin aspect of Poe the writer. However, in order for the hoax to succeed, Poe was required to shift the attention away from himself as the author of the piece just as the narrator of the Dupin mysteries does to highlight the genius of the detective.

This duality is necessary in many, if not all of Poe's fictions, particularly the tales which feature first-person narrators. Poe the writer must disappear, like the unnamed narrator of the

Dupin mysteries, behind his more interesting characters. James W. Gargano argues in respect to the relationship between Poe and his narrators that Poe “is conscious of the abnormalities of his narrators and does not condone the intellectual ruses through which they strive, only too earnestly, to justify themselves. In short, though his narrators are often febrile or demented, Poe is conspicuously ‘sane’” (829). By creating such convincing narrators, Poe conceals his own authorial voice. The common conflation of Poe with his characters stands as evidence of Poe’s subtle ability as a writer to disappear behind the often flamboyant narrators that he created.

While reading Dupin as a stand-in for Poe is instructive, reading the narrator of the Dupin tales as an author figure and a double to Dupin highlights a subtle commentary by Poe on the nature of authorship. Just as Dupin and the unnamed narrator use their complementary skills to create a narrative, so too does Poe create a harmonious balance between two contrasting aspects of his talent.

Just as the narrator of the Dupin tales is constantly misread, Poe is similarly misinterpreted in his cultural legacy. In the popular imagination, Edgar Allan Poe has become, in many ways, the embodiment of the Romantic conception of the poet. He worked, as the myth goes, in stifling isolation, haunted by internal demons, his method of composition fueled by equal parts alcohol, opium, and insanity. This larger-than-life view of Poe as the iconic Romantic author figure, however interesting it may be, often obscures Poe’s actual, much less sensational writing practices. Like the narrator of the Dupin tales, his authorial intelligence is often overlooked.

However, both Poe and the unnamed narrator rely on careful analysis in their roles as authors. Poe’s most well-known piece of nonfiction is probably his “Philosophy of Composition.” This essay displays a dedication to careful methodology in the composition of

poetry, with Poe recommending a step-by-step approach to writing poetry, beginning with the careful selection of an intended effect and proceeding with a series of conscious decisions in which the author uses deliberate devices—sound, image, repetition, etc.—to bring about that intended effect. Rather than tapping into a spontaneous overflow of feelings, or relying on intuition or divine inspiration, Poe advocates for deliberate calculation in the composition of literature. As an author figure, the narrator of the Dupin figure espouses a similar approach to composition. The unnamed narrator prides himself on his own analytic skills in composing the tales of Dupin's exploits—as argued earlier, the lengthy preamble to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” sets the narrator up as an analytical genius on a par with Dupin; the analytic skills he employs in writing the Dupin mysteries include economy of detail and careful observation of human behavior. Like Dupin, his narratives are calculated to achieve a certain effect. For the narrator, “the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic” (Poe, “Rue Morgue” 531), which echoes the philosophy of his real-life creator.

One way in which a careful reading of the narrator of the Dupin tales illuminates Poe's writing practices is the question of collaboration. The genius of the narrator aside, the Dupin tales do not exist without the presence of Dupin; the detective's exploits, regardless of the degree to which they are altered or enhanced by the narrator/author, serve as a foundational inspiration for the tales, a means of collaboration between two geniuses. While Poe may not have consciously imitated the writing being done by his American contemporaries, he was well aware, as evidenced by his criticism, of the writing being done at the time. For instance, in an 1846 series that appeared in *Godey's Lady's Book*—“The Literati of New York City”—Poe addressed the work of dozens of writers working in New York City. This extensive familiarity with

contemporary poetry and fiction is another way in which Poe worked inside of a community, rather than in isolation.

On a similar but more compelling note, Poe idolized many writers who came before him. Regarding external influences as a form of collaboration, Stillinger writes, “It is not farfetched [...] to see major influence as a type of collaboration in the works that are affected by it, and examples of such influence are not only abundant all through the history of literature but, according to some theorists, inescapable” (69). Although Poe likely did not personally collaborate with any of his contemporaries, many of Poe’s works bear the direct mark of influence of writers who came before him. Hubbell notes that “in ‘Tamerlane’ [Poe] followed so closely in the footsteps of Lord Byron that in later years he felt that perhaps he had been guilty of plagiarism” (99), and indeed, a strong Byronic influence is detectable through much of his work (Ljungquist 8), and an interest in Byron is directly acknowledged by Poe in his story “The Assignment.” Particularly in his early tales, Poe responded to and modeled his work on stories published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (Fisher 72). Many other influences exist, but these are among the most notable. Poe’s modeling of his own work on the works of these other writers demonstrates one way in which Poe’s writing process was not solely restricted to the confines of his own mind, to the solitary isolation of the proverbial Romantic garret.

In this light, the Dupin mysteries comment not only on the genius of the stories’ narrator and fictional author, but on authorship generally. Poe’s role as an important nineteenth-century critic is often overlooked, and the complexity of the model of authorship presented in the Dupin mysteries is a reminder of Poe’s often careful and compelling thinking as an influential critic. His criticism, together with the reflection of the Dupin mysteries’ model of authorship in Poe’s own practices underscores the ways in which Poe is not the ultimate embodiment of the mad

Romantic author, but instead a self-aware, methodical writer, interested in questions of authorship and in the ways that a text is produced.

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