

Poe's Dupin as professional, the Dupin stories  
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## Poe's Dupin as Professional, The Dupin Stories as Serial Text

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Studies in American Fiction

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 23, Number 2, Autumn 1995

pp. 215-229

10.1353/saf.1995.0015

ARTICLE

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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*William Crisman*

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## Notes

A much shorter version of this paper was delivered at the Pennsylvania College English Association meeting, Pittsburgh, April 16, 1994.

1. Susan Beegel, review of T. J. Binyon, *Murder Will Out: The Detective in Fiction*, *Poe Society of America Newsletter*, 18 (1990), 2; Jacques Lacan, "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. and ed. Jeffrey Mehlman, *YFS*, 48 (1971), 67.
2. Terence Whalen, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy," *AQ*, 44 (1992), 405.
3. *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Stuart Levine and Susan Levine (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), p. 191. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
4. Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth," trans. Willis Domingo *et al.*, *YFS* 52 (1975), 101, 105.
5. Richard Wilbur, "The Poe Mystery Case," *NYRB*, July 13, 1967, 24.
6. George Grella, "Poe's Tangled Web," *ArmD*, 21 (1988), 268-75; see also Mark Keller, "Dupin in the Rue 'Morgue.' Another Form of Madness?" *ArQ* 33 (1977), 249-55.
7. The "Dr. Watson" figure does have occasional champions like Terry J. Martin, who takes him as the "real" detective in "Murders in the Rue Morgue" because he has the ability to have feelings about the case. "Detection, Imagination, and the Introduction to 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'" *MLS*, 20 (1989), 38-41.
8. John T. Irwin, "Reading Poe's Mind: Politics, Mathematics, and the Association of Ideas in 'Murders in the Rue Morgue,'" *AmlH*, 4 (1992), 201-4.
9. Shawn Rosenheim, "The King of 'Secret Readers': Edgar Poe, Cryptography, and the Origins of the Detective Story," *ELH* 56 (1989), 386-87.
10. See Nikita Nankov, *Edgar Allen [sic] Poe as an American Romantic* (Des Moines: Occasional Papers in Language, Literature, and Linguistics, 1990), p. 3, and Dana Brand, "Reconstructing the 'Flanêur': Poe's Invention of the Detective Story," *Genre* 18 (1985), 49-54.
11. Whalen, p. 402; Christopher Rollason, "The Detective Myth in Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin Trilogy," *American Crime Fiction: Studies in the Genre*, ed. Brian Docherty (Hounds Mills: MacMillan, 1988), p. 12. Derrida's model of the stories' "drift and disorientation" (p. 101) emphasizes their indebtedness to a numbing variety of literary models, symbolized by the opiate atmosphere of Dupin's library, and reflected by the overt intertextual references between the three tales.
12. Lacan, p. 67.
13. Burton R. Pollin, "Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue': The Ingenious Web Unravelled," *SAR* (1977), 239. Like Grella, though on different grounds, Pollin thinks Poe expects "Murders in the Rue Morgue" to be read as a spoof.
14. Shulman, "Poe and the Powers of Mind," *ELH* 37 (1970), 255.
15. Brigid Brophy, "Detective Fiction: A Modern Myth of Violence?" *HudR* 18 (1965), 25.
16. Quoted and discussed in John A. Hodgson, "Decoding Poe? Poe, W.B. Tyler, and Cryptography," *JEGP* 92 (1993), 524.

17. Rollason, p. 6; Sevanne Woodward, "Lacan and Derrida on 'The Purloined Letter,'" *CLS* 26 (1989), 42. Woodward's remarks are based on the conjecture that "Dupin" may be a pun on French "du pain." Brophy suggests that Dupin's style of aristocracy is a "fantasy" that society after the French Revolution "wished could be true: he offers a way of returning to the aristocratic principle without violating [democratic] reason" ("Detective Fiction," 25).

18. Woodward plays, as do all writing in Lacan's shadow, on the dual meaning of "letter" as epistle and character of the alphabet. Thus Dupin exchanges language for financial figures in giving up the letter for money.

19. For the detective tale in relation to the supernatural, see Peter J. Brenner. "Die Geburt des Detektivromans aus dem Geist des Unheimlichen," *LWU* 11 (1978), esp. 5-8, and Benjamin Franklin Fisher, IV, "Poe, *Blackwood's*, and 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'" *ANQ* 12 (1974), 110. Syndy Conger's remarks are from "Another Secret of the Rue Morgue: Poe's Transformation of the *Geisterseher* Motif," *SSF*, 24 (1987), 9.

20. J. Brander Matthews made an early case for overmodesty in "Poe and the Detective Story" (1907; re pr. in *The Recognition of Edgar Allan...*

## POE'S DUPIN AS PROFESSIONAL, THE DUPIN STORIES AS SERIAL TEXT

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The reader of Poe's Dupin stories is caught between two contrary models of Dupin's professional status. On the one hand, Susan Beegele considers it "obvious" that Dupin is the "prototypical amateur detective" and thus by definition not a professional at all. Indeed, on a different level of theoretical discourse, Jacques Lacan experiences Dupin's interest in fees as a "clash with the rest" of "The Purloined Letter."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in such neo-historicist readings as Terence Whalen's, Dupin appears so money-focused that the actual solution to his mysteries becomes unimportant, and Dupin becomes the extreme opposite of the amateur puzzle solver.<sup>2</sup> Adjudicating between such views requires exploring the kind of professional Dupin is as well as Poe's motive in creating such a professional.

Dupin is, of course, not a professional investigator of the movie sort with a sign outside, a receptionist, and a regular procession of clients. He also is not, on the other hand, merely a disinterested puzzle solver, in spite of his claim in "Murders in the Rue Morgue" that his "ultimate object is only the truth."<sup>3</sup> In fact, following the Dupin stories in their self-conscious sequence from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" through "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" to "The Purloined Letter" shows the development of an increasing professionalism.

Such professionalism seems only reasonable given Dupin's background. A member of "an illustrious family" who "had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it," Dupin would naturally be interested in making money, especially since his tastes in life include buying "very rare" books ("Rue Morgue," p. 179). Dupin does not simply exist in an atmosphere of books, as Jacques Derrida rightly points out,<sup>4</sup> but in a world of books as pricey commodities.

Many readers, Richard Wilbur among them, have noted the similarity in analytical thought between Dupin and Legrande of "The Gold Bug," and the reference to Dupin's character as "succumbing" to the force of poverty also recalls the parallel social condition of Legrande.<sup>5</sup> Legrande's poverty not only signals lack of money and possessions but also betokens social disgrace verging on scandal, a "mortification" that



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