



Poe Invents the Modern Detective Story

What do Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and C. Auguste Dupin all have in common? Edgar A. Poe.

In 1841, Poe invented the modern detective story with his *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. In this story, Poe presents an intelligent but eccentric detective (C. Auguste Dupin) who solves crimes through a process of rational thinking. Poe calls this process "ratiocination." This first detective appears

again in *The Purloined Letter* and *The Mystery of Marie Roget*. He is the predecessor of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. These famous detectives can trace their ancestry back to Poe's Dupin and his skills of ratiocination.

Poe's Comments

"These tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key. I do not mean to say that they are not ingenious—but people think them more ingenious than they are—on account of their method and air of method. In *The Murders in the Rue*

Morgue, for instance, where is the ingenuity of unraveling a web which you yourself (the author) have woven for the express purpose of unraveling?"

Letter to associate dated 1848

Tribute

"Edgar Allan Poe... was the father of the detective tale, and covered its limits so completely that I fail to see how his followers can find any fresh ground which they can confidently call their own. For the secret of the thinness and also of the intensity of the detective story is that the writer is left with only one quality, that of intellectual acuteness, with

which to endow his hero. Everything else is outside the picture and weakens the effect. The problem and its solution must form the theme, and the character-drawing is limited and subordinate. On this narrow path the writer must walk, and he sees the footmarks of Poe always in front of him."

-Arthur Conan Doyle

Reviews

"With *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* Poe became the only American ever to invent a form of literature. He invented the detective story. He also perfected it."

Vincent Buranelli
Edgar Allan Poe, 2nd Edition,
Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1977

"Take, again, the marvelous train of analytical reasoning whereby he arrives at truth in the *Rue Morgue*, a tale wherein the horror of the incidents is overborne by the acuteness of the arguments; and is introduced by a specimen of mind-reading..."

Martin Farquhar Tupper
Literary Gazette, London,
January 31, 1846