

Depict the character of the detective / of Dupin in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*.

C. Auguste Dupin is a fictional character created by Edgar Allan Poe. Dupin made his first appearance in Poe's 1841 short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", widely considered the first detective fiction story. He reappears in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844).

Dupin is not a professional detective and his motivations for solving the mysteries change throughout the three stories. Using what Poe termed "ratiocination", Dupin combines his considerable intellect with creative imagination, even putting himself in the mind of the criminal. His talents are strong enough that he appears able to read the mind of his companion, the unnamed narrator of all three stories.

Dupin is from what was once a wealthy family, but "by a variety of untoward events" has been reduced to more humble circumstances, and contents himself only with the basic necessities of life. He now lives in Paris with his close friend, the anonymous narrator of the stories. The two met by accident while both were searching for "the same rare and very remarkable volume" in an obscure library. This scene, the two characters searching for a hidden text, serves as a metaphor for detection. They promptly move to an old manor located in Faubourg Saint-Germain. For hobbies, Dupin is "fond" of enigmas, conundrums, and hieroglyphics. He bears the title *Chevalier*,^[6] meaning that he is a knight in the *Légion d'honneur*. Dupin shares some features with the later gentleman detective, a character type that became common in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction.^[citation needed] He is acquainted with police prefect "G.", who appears in all three stories seeking his counsel.

In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", Dupin investigates the murder of a mother and daughter in Paris.^[7] He investigates another murder in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". This story was based on the true story of Mary Rogers, a saleswoman at a cigar store in Manhattan whose body was found floating in the Hudson River in 1841. Dupin's final appearance, in "The Purloined Letter", features an investigation of a letter stolen from the French queen. Poe called this story "perhaps, the best of my tales of ratiocination". Throughout the three stories, Dupin travels through three distinct settings. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", he travels through city streets; in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", he is in the wide outdoors; in "The Purloined Letter", he is in an enclosed private space.

Dupin is not actually a professional detective, and his motivations change through his appearances. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", he investigates the murders for his personal amusement, and to prove the innocence of a falsely accused man. He refuses a financial reward. However, in "The Purloined Letter", Dupin purposefully pursues a financial reward.

In the stories "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," Poe creates the genre of detective fiction and the original expert sleuth, C. Auguste Dupin. In both "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," Dupin works outside conventional police methods, and he uses his distance from traditional law enforcement to explore new ways of solving crimes. He continually argues that the Paris police exhibit stale and unoriginal methods of analysis. He says that the police are easily distracted by the specific facts of the crime and are unable to provide an objective standpoint from which to investigate. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue,"

the police cannot move beyond the gruesome nature of the double homicide. Because they are so distracted by the mutilated and choked victims, they do not closely inspect the windows of the apartment, which reveal a point of entry and escape. Dupin distances himself from the emotional aspect of the scene's violence. Like a mathematician, he views the crime scene as a site of calculation, and he considers the moves of the murderer as though pitted against him in a chess game.

In "The Purloined Letter," Dupin solves the theft of the letter by putting himself at risk politically. Whereas the Paris police tread lightly around the actions of Minister D——, an important government official, Dupin ignores politics just as he ignores emotion in the gruesome murders of the Rue Morgue. In this story, Dupin reveals his capacity for revenge. When the Minister insulted him in Vienna years before the crime presently in question, Dupin promised to repay the slight. This story demonstrates that Dupin's brilliance is not always dispassionately mathematical. He cunningly analyzes the external facts of the crime, but he is also motivated by his hunger for revenge. Dupin must function as an independent detective because his mode of investigation thrives on intuition and personal cunning, which cannot be institutionalized in a traditional police force.

With the help of prompting questions and statements, largely from the narrator—who is a friend of Dupin—the Prefect, Monsieur G, provides Dupin with the details of the case. The letter has been stolen from the Queen, in her presence, by the Minister D——, a known political opponent. However, due to the sensitive nature of the letter's contents, the Queen and her allies, including the Prefect, cannot seize the letter openly, and so have tried to search the Minister's home in private. Dupin asks questions about the Prefect's search methods to determine if the search has been handled correctly. Dupin says that the Minister has conducted a good search, yet he encourages the Prefect to make a thorough search of the premises. The Prefect is confused, but takes his advice. However, a month later, when the Prefect returns to Dupin's home, he has still found nothing. On this second visit, Dupin asks the Prefect about the reward for finding the letter, and the Prefect says that it is fifty thousand francs. Dupin has the Prefect make out the check, then produces the letter.

Later, Dupin explains to the narrator the methods of deductive reasoning that he used to figure out where the Minister was hiding the letter. He notes that the Parisian police have done the best that they could, because they and the Prefect are operating on a faulty assumption: they assume that the Minister would try to hide the letter in some "secret" compartment, and thus, all of their efforts are concentrated on searching in hidden places. Dupin explains how, by knowing details about a person's behavior and background, one can figure out his actions. In this case, Dupin knows that the Minister is aware of the police's searches, and knows that the police will look in the most hidden spots, but will ignore any area that is in plain view.

Under the pretense of a social visit, Dupin visits the Minister and almost immediately locates the purloined letter in a letter rack on the wall. On a second visit, Dupin creates a diversion, during which time he grabs the stolen letter, replacing it with a fake copy.

In 1845, the year "The Purloined Letter" was reprinted in *Tales of Edgar A. Poe*, reviewer George Colton noted of this story and the other tales of ratiocination that "the

difference between acumen and cunning, calculation and analysis, are admirably illustrated in these tales." In fact, favorable response to "The Purloined Letter" was widespread. As Eric W. Carlson notes in his entry for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the story was "immediately popular," and "it was among his first translated into French."

The popularity of the story was still evident three decades later. In 1879, Robert Louis Stevenson noted that, "if anyone wishes to be excited, let him read.... the three stories about C. Auguste Dupin, the philosophical detective." On a similar note, a year later, Edmund Clarence Stedman noted in *Scribner's Monthly* that Poe's "strength is unquestionable in those clever pieces of ratiocination."

In the twentieth century, the reviews of the story were still largely positive, and many critics, like Vincent Buranelli, noted Poe's role as the father of the detective story, saying that he was "the only American ever to invent a form of literature. "Buranelli notes that Poe "also perfected it," and says that "The Purloined Letter" is one of two detective stories—the other being Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"—that "may be the best ever written."