

ANALYSIS

“The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841)

Edgar Allan Poe

(1809-1849)

POE'S CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY

1. Effacement of the author
2. Evocation of sensation
3. Economy and unity
4. Emphasis on single effect

POE'S METHOD

“A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be not one word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preestablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.”

from Poe's Review of *Twice-Told Tales*
by Nathaniel Hawthorne

DEFINITION OF MODERN SHORT STORY

1. A relatively short narrative
2. A single episode is completed
3. The true author is effaced
4. The story is more shown than told, increasing illusion of real life
5. Tends to satisfy the classical unities of time, place and action
6. Builds to an epitome or epiphany

CONVENTIONS OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

In his review of *Twice-Told Tales* (1842), Poe differentiates himself from Hawthorne: “Some of the finest tales are tales of ratiocination.” In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) he originated or perfected almost all the important technical devices used thereafter in stories of crime and detection, including:

1. The transcendent detective (Poe's Dupin preceded Sherlock Holmes)

2. The admiring and slightly stupid foil (such as Dr. Watson)
3. The well-intentioned blundering of the police
4. The locked room: how did the murderer get in and out?
5. The pointing finger of unjust suspicion
6. The surprise solution (Perry Mason)
7. The staged ruse to force a guilty hand
8. The condescending explanation at the end

Michael Hollister (2015)