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Woven for Unraveling's Sake: The Reproductive Machine of Surplus Enjoyment in Poe's Detective Tales

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Abstract

Often regarded as the father of detective literature, Edgar Allan Poe has influenced generations of readers who enjoy his intellectual puzzles and games of reasoning. Among his works, Poe's Dupin trilogy holds a crucial place, as it not only established the standard form of the analytical detective but also shaped the narrative structure used in modern detective fiction. However, a closer look shows that the reasoning guiding Dupin in his investigations is often not entirely rigorous but rather a dramatic portrayal of reasoning. This paper argues that it is not just the Dupin trilogy but also other works discussed here—such as "The Gold-Bug," "Thou Art the Man," "The Man of the Crowd," and "The Oblong Box"—where this pattern appears. To describe this recurring structure, the discussion draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis and Slavoj Zizek's concept of surplus enjoyment to explore how detective fiction influences narrative design, reflecting both the author's intent and the reader's desire to be understood. In this view, Poe's detective stories are not just displays of strict logic but also retellings of the pleasure found in solving mysteries. What makes detective fiction endlessly appealing, however, is not the promise of perfect deduction but the performative act of resolution—where readers repeatedly experience the symbolic restoration of order through facing the unknown.

Keywords

Edgar Allan Poe, Detective Fiction, Ratiocination, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Surplus Enjoyment, Slavoj Žižek

1. Introduction

Despite its miscellaneous origins ranging from the 18th-century newspaper reportage to the 19th-century "romans policers", the detective story first took proper

shape with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in 1841 (Sussex, 2010). Subsequently featuring the archetypal "ultra-rationalist detective" (Nicol, 2012), Le Chevalier Auguste Dupin, Poe completed this trilogy of ratiocination (logical reasoning) with "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842-1843) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). During this period, Poe had just recuperated from a severe illness, followed by a financial crisis concerning Philadelphia banks. Due to extreme financial constraints, he accepted an editorial position at *Graham's Magazine*, which "had a total of 5000 subscribers" by that time (Meyers, 2000). With Poe's innovative detective stories, the *Graham's* has garnered "an ever-widening circle of readers" (130). Nevertheless, while readers craved for such intellectual adventures, Poe commented that "people think [these tales] more ingenious than they are" (Poe, 1846). This dismissive sentiment also echoed in his lesser-known fictions, such as "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) and "The Oblong Box" (1844), two parodies of his typical detective fictions characterized by intense suspense and dark humor.

Regarding the tales of ratiocination (in a strict sense, they refer specifically to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", and "The Purloined Letter"; in a broader sense, this term can be applied generally to any of Poe's stories showcasing deductive reasoning and logical analysis), Poe acutely discerned that "something in a new key" had granted them success (Poe, 1846). However, this paper intends to expound that "something in a new key" suggests otherwise—the readers expect nothing but old thrills ending with all mysteries solved—namely, Poe's fictional detective, Dupin, who must reduce "the impossible to the possible", "the inexplicable to the explained", and "the supernatural to the natural", relies more on the gimmick of narrative than on the enlightenment rationalism during case cracking (Caillois, 1983). Per Hannah Arendt's statement, "the world of machines has become a substitute for the real world". Similarly, the reproductive machine of mystery fiction has replaced the process of true deduction (Arendt, 1998). Despite the transparent red herring, readers keep returning to similar tales where "the rational faculties (supported by scientific techniques) reign supreme" (Nicol, 2012). Moreover, their reading palate yearns for surplus enjoyment by repeatedly unraveling puzzles woven solely for unraveling, which continues to fuel numerous detective fiction authors to reproduce the "machinations of the mystery plot" (Nicol, 2012).

Among the seven stories discussed in this article, three are the Dupin tales. Poe himself called these works his "tales of ratiocination" in his letters, and later critics have often seen them as early examples of detective fiction. As the heart of Poe's detective stories, the Dupin trilogy thus gets special focus in this study. Additionally, four other stories—"The Gold-Bug," "Thou Art the Man," "The Man of the Crowd," and "The Oblong Box"—are also frequently considered key works from Poe's period of experimenting with ratiocinative writing. For instance, in the third chapter of his book "The Rationale of Verse," Daniel Hoffman also chooses these stories to showcase Poe's move toward detective fiction (Hoffman, 1998). Consequently, this article includes these four texts as supplementary materials to offer a

more complete view of Poe's development of detective fiction.

Given the genre's focus on plot rather than detailed description, this article draws on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek to provide a structural analysis of how narratives are constructed. In *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis*: *Reflections on Seminar XVII*, Lacan introduces the concept of *plus-de-jouir*, more widely known in scholarship as "surplus jouissance" or "surplus enjoyment." Drawing on Marx's theory of surplus value, Lacan describes surplus enjoyment as the excess pleasure generated by the functioning of the signifying system: it is not ultimate satisfaction, but an unavoidable leftover that cannot be completely absorbed (Clemens & Grigg, 2006). Because this structural leftover remains, surplus enjoyment keeps fueling desire, fantasy, and repetition. Žižek further examines this idea in *Surplus Enjoyment*: *A Guide for the Non-Perplexed*, where he argues that, in modern ideology, surplus enjoyment often appears as discursive repetition (Žižek, 2022). By forcing individuals to give up part of their freedom of thought through repeated discourse, ideology allows them to find satisfaction in that very process, and willingly accepting this enforced repetition becomes a key form of surplus enjoyment. This article suggests that traditional detective fiction shares a noticeable similarity in its narrative structures, yet mystery fans continue to pursue increasingly innovative ways to portray crime and detection. This seemingly paradoxical phenomenon can be explained effectively by the theory of surplus enjoyment.

Accordingly, this study uses the concept of surplus enjoyment as its starting point to analyze "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," "The Purloined Letter," "The Gold-Bug," "Thou Art the Man," "The Man of the Crowd," and "The Oblong Box." In doing so, it aims to explain why readers remain so captivated by the seemingly repetitive and potentially dull structure of detective-solving-everything fiction.

2. *Tales of Ratiocination* Displays More an "Air" ("Text: Edgar Allan Poe to Phillip P. Cooke" LTR-240) of Rationality than True Logic Reasoning

2.1. Detective Dupin Trilogy Exhibits the Farce of Unraveling a Web Purely Woven for Unraveling

The fundamental principles of detective fiction are widely acknowledged to have been established by Edgar Allan Poe's trilogy of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842-1843), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). In these three stories, Poe consistently introduces a pattern that would later become a central element of the genre: an unresolved mystery, a series of failed or partial explanations, a limited number of clues, and a final moment where the detective demonstrates their interpretive authority.

Taking "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as an example, C. Auguste Dupin solves a perplexing case in Paris where two women are savagely murdered in a locked room. Through astute observation and logical deduction, he discovers the

unlikely culprit to be an escaped orangutan, resolving the mystery that has previously stumped the police (Poe, 1894b). Concerning the theme of this tale, Poe told his friend Joseph Snodgrass in a letter that it was intended for "the exercise of ingenuity in detecting a murderer" (Quinn, 1998). From the beginning of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin exhibits his analytical skill by inferring the unnamed narrator's opinions on a certain actor, using insights purely derived from the narrator's earlier remarks and behaviors. In his later deduction of the case, Dupin adheres to this process of reasoning from one or more premises to reach a logically certain conclusion, which lays the foundation for Poe's tales of ratiocination. Since then, the brilliant, rational detective figure has made a successful debut in Poe's writing, thereby pioneering many of the characteristics and methodologies that will later become typical of the detective fiction genre.

The second story in this series, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," continues to follow the detective C. Auguste Dupin as he investigates a young woman found dead in the Seine River. Using newspaper articles to gather evidence, Dupin theorizes that Marie Rogêt may have been a victim of a violent crime committed by someone she loved—probably a sailor—and that her body was disposed of to avoid further scandal. The police eventually catch the true murderer with Dupin's deductions, but the story ends without a definitive resolution, which is somewhat unusual for detective stories of that time. Poe based "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" on the real-life murder of Mary Rogers, known as the "Beautiful Cigar Girl" in New York City, whose body was found in the Hudson River in 1841. Poe set the story's background in Paris, providing a detailed analysis of the evidence and creating a logical narrative to solve the case (Meyers, 2000). However, despite Dupin's meta-analysis of the available evidence—mostly from newspaper reports—readers still do not learn who committed the crime in the end. Poe appears comfortable with the idea that the case is considered closed by the police, much to everyone's satisfaction. As Dupin himself comments, the newspapers deliberately aim to "create a sensation ... [rather] than to further the cause of truth" when reporting on Marie Rogêt's case (Poe, 1894c). Still, this short story itself echoes Dupin's claim that Poe's detailed, vivid depiction of the crime significantly enhances the story's appeal. Although detective Dupin seeks to restore justice through his rational thinking, readers like "the crowd" in the story are less interested in the actual truth and more drawn to the thrill of solving a mystery. The detective story formula, with its clever sleuth always revealing the villain, allows readers to enjoy the excitement while feeling morally upright. This compelling dynamic is likely why Poe chose to extend it into his later detective stories.

In the final part of the trilogy "The Purloined Letter," C. Auguste Dupin outsmarts Minister D—who steals a compromising letter from a royal lady to blackmail her. The minister's hotel has been thoroughly searched, yet the police remain confused. Dupin takes on the case and wisely concludes that the letter is hidden in disguise. He tricks the minister by replacing the stolen letter with a duplicate and sends the original back to the royal lady, noting that sometimes things can be

hidden right in plain sight (Poe, 1894e). Unlike the previous two stories, this one has attracted much academic interest for its psychological depth. J. Jacques Lacan, in "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", uses the story to explore the roles of the characters and the symbolic form that reveals key patterns of the human unconscious (Lacan & Mehlman, 1972). During this seminar, Lacan treats the letter as a floating signifier, whose value lies not in its contents but in the person who owns it, reflecting shifts in desire and power among the characters. As readers, we stay engaged with Poe's storytelling even without knowing the letter's details, which underscores that the real charm of detective fiction lies in the pursuit rather than the catch. Lacan's analysis, while supporting the audience's reaction, has faced significant criticism, notably from Jacques Derrida. In "The Purveyor of Truth," Derrida accuses Lacan of ignoring the existence of the unnamed narrator and the overall narrative structure in his eagerness to validate psychoanalytical theories, just like Dupin racking his brains to expose Minister D—for personal revenge (Derrida, 1975). Derrida questions Lacan's assumptions about the constant pursuit of a floating signifier, arguing that meanings are always deferred—the pursuit itself becomes a signifier, subject to ongoing differences and delays. Therefore, nothing is fixed in textual interpretation. On this basis, Derrida argues that "The Purloined Letter" should be seen not only as an individual story but also as part of the Dupin trilogy and the larger genre of Poe's detective fiction. Regarding Derrida's critique of Lacan, Robert Con Davis points out that they view this story through different lenses: the former focuses on how the unconscious influences individual behavior through symbolic systems. At the same time, the latter emphasizes the shifting nature of meaning that evades fixed interpretation (Davis, 1983). Furthermore, Barbara Johnson notes that, while Derrida accuses Lacan of imposing hypothetical frameworks on an open-ended text, Derrida also tries to confine Lacan's ideas within his own interpretive limits (Johnson, 1977). So far, "The Purloined Letter," along with its academic discussions, has created a never-ending cycle of interpretations, embodying the core of detective fiction: the endless pursuit to solve mysteries.

When revisiting this trilogy, it becomes clear that these stories laid the foundation for the detective fiction genre, which later writers have often tried to imitate. Although it remains popular, the trilogy shows a shift toward prioritizing entertainment over logical reasoning. This trend is also seen in Edgar Allan Poe's other detective stories, and we will focus on how it appears in the earlier works, "The Gold Bug" and "Thou Art the Man."

2.2. "The Gold Bug" (1843) and "Thou Art the Man" (1844) Further Reveals the Gimmick Nature of Deduction

Like the Dupin trilogy, Poe uses an analytical structure in "The Gold-Bug," though the story is more of a treasure hunt than a typical detective story. Instead of introducing another detective character, Poe centers on William Legrand, whose decoding of a cryptogram ultimately uncovers a buried pirate treasure (Poe, 1843a).

Although Jupiter suspects that Legrand's strange behavior results from being bitten by the gold-colored bug, this explanation is seen as a comic misunderstanding rather than the true reason behind Legrand's reasoning. The main force of the story is not irrational influence but the intentional display of rational analysis through cryptography.

An insightful detail from the story's publication history highlights the constructed nature of this analytical performance. Different versions of the story feature different ciphers: in "Text-02b-p2" (published in 1843 in the Dollar Newspaper), part of the code says "[a] good glass in the bishop's hostel in the devil's seat forty-one degrees," whereas in "Text-03c" (published in 1845 in The J. Lorimer Graham copy of Tales), "forty-one" has been changed to "twenty-one." Significantly, Legrand's letter-frequency table remains the same in both texts, showing that a recount did not accompany the plaintext change. As experts have observed, this means the famous "twenty-one" solution does not match the published symbol counts. In 1843, the symbol "8" (mapped to E) appears 33 times; in 1846, it appears 34 times. Similarly, ";" appears 26 times in 1843 and 27 times in 1846, "*" from 13 to 14 times, and symbol "1" from 8 to 7. Symbols ‡ and "(" change from 16 to 15 and 10 to 9, respectively (Poe, 1843b, 1845). Because Poe did not revise the table, it only accurately reflects the 1843 text. In practical terms, a careful reader trying to solve the puzzle again would notice the numbers are off by one in several cases - yet the story continues smoothly. This suggests Poe did not intend the cryptogram to be solved again by the reader; rather, it is a performed inference. Yet Poe left the table as if the original "forty" remained. Narratively, this shows that the cryptogram functions more as a staged demonstration of reasoning than a fully verifiable puzzle. The discrepancy prompts us to see the cipher as a theatrical device that performs logic for the reader, inviting enjoyment of the deduction spectacle without requiring exact verification.

From this perspective, "Thou Art the Man" highlights the theatrical aspects of detection. In the story, Mr. Pennifeather, wrongly accused, is exonerated when the narrator reveals Charles Goodfellow as the real murderer (Poe, 1894f). The narrative follows Poe's typical detective pattern: misleading clues deceive the public, and a sharp mind uncovers the truth. However, the final reveal is not only based on logic but also involves a carefully staged theatrical scene. The narrator creates a scenario where a voice emanates from a hidden corpse in a wine cask, startling Goodfellow into confessing. Poe blends a mechanical device with staged ventriloquism, turning detection into a performance. This scene alludes to supernatural punishment while maintaining a sensational, quasi-Gothic thrill. Overall, the story both celebrates and critiques the idea of straightforward logical resolution. In "Thou Art the Man," Poe similarly uses a ghostly confession as a detection device. The narrator employs a ventriloquized corpse in a wine cask to compel Goodfellow's confession. Both stories emphasize dramatic effect. Drawing on Lacanian theory, this crafted spectacle generates surplus enjoyment, through which readers find pleasure not only in the resolution but also in the reasoning process itself. The following analysis traces a path from the cipher mismatch through its narrative

function to the surplus enjoyment it produces, ending with a close reading of "The Gold-Bug" to illustrate this progression.

In summary, "The Gold-Bug" and "Thou Art the Man," like the Dupin stories, are often regarded as key contributions to the development of detective fiction. Their use of coded messages, false leads, and dramatic reveals helped establish the norms of the detective genre. These stories also show that Poe's focus is not fully on logic but also on its theatrical presentation. Deduction in these tales isn't merely about uncovering the truth; it's a carefully crafted narrative device. From a Žižekian perspective, these scenes create surplus enjoyment for the reader (Žižek, 1992). The detail of the cipher mismatch becomes a site of excess meaning. Lacan views the cryptogram as a signifier whose failure disrupts the illusion of rational completeness, creating a "gap" in the Symbolic order. But this gap isn't frustrating; it enhances enjoyment by emphasizing the artifice. Žižek contends that the pleasure lies in the very structure of reason itself. The reader admires Legrand's cleverness, even when aware that all steps are somewhat predetermined. Essentially, the logic functions like a fetish: it appears to be a self-sufficient deduction chain but relies on Poe's storytelling. The surplus pleasure comes from witnessing reason in action: audiences enjoy solving clues and the detective's success, despite or because of the "trick." Therefore, the story's entertainment derives not only from the answers but also from the process of discovery. The minor inconsistency heightens this effect, reminding us that the reader's satisfaction comes from observing the game itself, not just from solving it.

Consequently, Poe appeared to understand, through his experimentation with these plots, that readers may not always tolerate complex reasoning structures. In the next two stories, "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Oblong Box," he adopts a more self-aware stance, partly satirizing the investigative techniques he contributed to and highlighting their limitations as storytelling devices.

2.3. "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) and "The Oblong Box" (1844) Serve as Cynical Parodies of Detective Fiction

Although "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Oblong Box" do not fit neatly into the mystery genre, either traditionally or otherwise, they symbolize the detective fiction's shift away from Gothic romance roots. In doing so, Poe skillfully redefines detective tropes and Gothic elements, creating two stories filled with sharp satirical undertones.

In "The Man of the Crowd," the narrator, whose name remains unknown, becomes fascinated by an enigmatic old man observed in a London coffee shop. Driven to learn the man's story, the narrator follows him through the bustling city streets, seeking to decipher his character. The chase occurs at night across different parts of the city, but the man's secrets stay hidden (Poe, 1894a). In this story, no crime takes place, and the suspicious stranger is a figment of the narrator's imagination. The narrator's suspicions about the old man intensify, leading to a long, obsessive chase that feels like an endless detective pursuit. Yet, as the story unfolds, the narrator does not obtain any definitive answers. His questions are inherently biased,

deeply rooted in his mind. This makes the pursuit pointless because the riddle he seeks to solve has no clear answer—much like real-life situations that often lack straightforward solutions. The narrator's struggles not only cast doubt on the detective's seemingly unstoppable nature but also critique the conventions of the classical mystery genre. Generally, detective stories feature intricate mysteries with solutions based on logical reasoning. By contrast, Poe's story implies that the world cannot always be understood purely through logic. The apparent order masks a mystery that defies complete comprehension.

Likewise, "The Oblong Box" vividly illustrates the limits of reason when faced with absurd reality. In this story, the unnamed narrator is consumed by curiosity about a coffin-shaped box belonging to Cornelius Wyatt, his old college friend and shipmate. As the narrator hears rumors and observes Wyatt's strange behaviors, his obsession with the box grows, ultimately leading to the shocking discovery that it contains Wyatt's deceased wife. The story ends tragically when Wyatt dies trying to save the box during a shipwreck, also ending the narrator's grim fixation (Poe, 1894d). When focusing on Wyatt's heartbreaking experiences, this story resembles a classic Gothic horror tale. However, by shifting attention to the narrator's frequent misreadings of the box's contents, it also comes across as the funny misadventures of a clumsy detective. During the voyage, the narrator notices several times that Wyatt's wife leaves their cabin at midnight for the third state-room and only returns in the morning. Meanwhile, he hears what he thinks are Wyatt's sobs coming from the box and mistakes them for artistic passion. Despite its unusual shape—measuring six feet long and two and a half feet wide, reminiscent of a coffin—and its foul smell, he still believes the box holds a highly valuable replica of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper (Poe, 1894d). The narrator, convinced it's a rare masterpiece, overlooks clues suggesting a corpse inside. He believes that the wife's mysterious disappearance and Wyatt's mourning definitively prove the painting's existence, forming a scenario that is both tragic and absurd. "The Oblong Box" skillfully employs dark humor to highlight flaws in logic, showing how the same evidence can lead to different conclusions. Unlike traditional detective stories that emphasize details as the key to truth, this story warns that focusing too much on minor details can distort reality and cause bigger mistakes in reasoning.

At this point, Edgar Allan Poe has finished analyzing his detective stories through his own works. He not only created the prototype of the clever detective but also highlighted the boundaries of pure logic. Next, we will explore Poe's views on rationalism from both his perspective and that of his readers up to the present.

3. *Tales of Ratiocination* Illustrates a Reproductive Machine of Surplus Enjoyment

3.1. Edgar Allan Poe Transforms the Old Romantic Thrills into the Novel *Ratiocination Tales*

From Poe's perspective, the tales involving reasoned deduction are often overval-

ued for their cleverness. While J. Gerald Kennedy attempts to describe Poe's detective story writing as a "ratiocinative cycle" that marks a departure from and a return to romanticism, it remains unclear whether Poe truly entered this so-called ratiocinative phase (Kennedy, 1975). Below are two arguments explaining Poe's preferred writing styles between 1840 and 1844.

Kennedy notes that the rise and decline of this man of reason can be observed in "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) and "The Oblong Box" (Kennedy, 1975). However, the "Chronological List of Poe's Tales" indicates that this detective character appears more frequently (The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 2012). In 1844, Poe wrote 12 short stories, including "Mesmeric Revelation"—a Gothic horror published in August—and "The Purloined Letter," a detective story published in October. Poe seemed comfortable with exploring both the mysterious passions and the clear logic. Although Poe began composing these notable tales of deduction in 1840, his career was nearing its end. Whether Poe deliberately ceased writing detective stories after 1844 remains uncertain. Consequently, it's challenging to determine Poe's evolving views on romanticism and enlightenment across this cycle, as suggested by Kennedy.

Second, in terms of his biographies, Poe was always focused on the popularity and sales of his works (Hoffman, 1998). Although Gothic stories remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, public interest in detective and police fiction also increased, particularly in Europe (Sussex, 2010). Poe's detective stories seem more aimed at appealing to the general audience than at a steady emphasis on logical reasoning.

While Edgar Allan Poe primarily focused on crafting tales of reasoning, he never lost his flair for Gothic fiction. In many short stories like "The Oblong Box," he demonstrated how detective stories and Gothic thrillers could blend seamlessly and even evolve into one another. His works from this era highlight two key points: first, detective fiction inherits Romanticism's legacy while adding elements of rationalism. Poe does not fully support the idea that reason alone can solve all problems, but he sees the "man of reason" as vulnerable to paranoia and absurdity. (Kennedy, 1975). Second, as one of the earliest full-time writers, Poe was keenly aware of market trends. The rising popularity of crime fiction in Western Europe indicated a shift in audience preferences. Using his Gothic skills, Poe created detective stories with gripping plots, starting with an enigmatic setup, featuring multiple false deductions, and ultimately revealing the truth through careful attention to small details—forming a formula of reasoning tales that captivated readers. From the success of the Dupin trilogy and other detective stories, Poe knew that general audiences appreciated the detective's rationality and enjoyed reading without mental fatigue. What drives this popularity? The next section will explore the psychological reasons behind these audience preferences and their relation to the detective story formula.

3.2. The Readers' Reproductive Machine of Surplus Enjoyment

According to Maurizio Ascari, detective fiction attracts readers with "competitive

[spirits]" who enjoy solving mysteries like the detective characters, as well as those seeking a good puzzle and a satisfying conclusion (Ascari, 2007). Both groups can find fulfillment in stories of reasoning, such as Poe's carefully crafted puzzles. However, because many of Poe's detective stories leave several case details unexplained, we should question whether readers with "competitive [spirits]" also overlook these gaps, especially when they are engrossed in the stories.

Earlier in section 1.2, we argued that popular readers may not prioritize the reliability of specific reasoning processes in detective stories. Instead, they focus on experiencing the deduction from the narrator's perspective and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the mystery's structure. During Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'," the tendency of general readers to follow detective figures has been described as part of the deceptive effect of the detective genre's trickery (Lacan & Mehlman, 1972). Here, Lacan notes that the letter in this tale serves as a floating signifier within the ongoing chain of signification, which also echoes the plot of Poe's "The Gold Bug". Similar to the purloined letter, the worth of the gold bug fluctuated as the protagonist tried to decipher the mysterious codes. Additionally, "The Gold Bug" has circulated with various, sometimes incorrect, versions of the cipher (Poe, 1843b, 1845). Even with numerous factual inaccuracies, readers remain captivated by these stories. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen described a similar situation in which the middle-class housewife tirelessly devotes herself to meaningless chores "disguised under some form of work or household duties or social amenities," all the while enjoying her dutiful role in the family. In both cases, people care little about what they are doing, as long as they believe they are involved in some noble purpose (Veblen, 2007). The audience appears to enjoy solving puzzles through pure logic, but instead, they prefer the detective to savor this intellectual process for them. Once the chaos of crime is organized, readers become so satisfied that they readily overlook the obvious tricks authors use, such as police officers providing multiple incorrect answers, detectives uncovering the truth from minor clues, and evidence always being sufficient to solve the case. Poe's detective stories showcase these techniques' potential in crafting detective fiction, which, over time, develop into standard patterns.

From the readers' perspective, detective stories usually have a very similar structure to popcorn movies—sitting down with a drink and snacks, you don't need extra attention to understand the plot and enjoy the big-screen experience. Similarly, Lacan highlights this tendency to allow others to experience enjoyment on their behalf, specifically the pursuit of surplus enjoyment. In a seminar on the Greek tragedy Antigone, he states: "Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you." (Lacan, 1997). Thus, this psychoanalytical approach may illuminate the relationship between the structure of Poe's detective stories and the audience.

In his research on Lacanian theories, Slavoj Žižek explains that "[surplus]-enjoyment implies the paradox of a thing which is always (and nothing but) an ex-

cess about itself" (Žižek, 2022). When analyzing detective fiction, the readership's preference for the classic "logic and deduction" detective, exemplified by C. Auguste Dupin, also reveals an expectation that the detective will successfully "explain the entire mystery and reconstruct 'what really happened'" during the case (Žižek, 1992). This formula, which has gradually solidified since Edgar Allan Poe, has already transformed the typical detective stories into "sheer [entertainments] governed by firm conventions." Whenever the audience dives into classic detective fiction inspired by Poe's tales of ratiocination, they know that every sin will ultimately face retribution, thereby easing their moral concerns about disturbing scenes. This knowledge has alone diminished readers' enthusiasm for deeply engaging with the text, ultimately promoting passive reading rather than active understanding. The readers' shift towards compulsive consumerism is also reflected in the way mysteries are reproduced. New books, essays, films, and TV series that still follow Poe's traditional detective genre formula all serve as reiterations of the audience's enjoyment production. According to Žižek, "We are obliged to enjoy. Enjoyment becomes a kind of weird, perverted duty" (Žižek, 2012). In this context, readers accept the gimmicky nature of traditional detective stories because they crave the gimmick itself. The softened portrayals of crime influence their moral feelings, while the detective's role caters to their rational side. Ultimately, disorder is always resolved by the end of these stories. Therefore, they keep revisiting classic detective stories to recreate the joy of consumption, effectively becoming machines that produce excess pleasure.

To sum up, no matter how desperate the fictional detective is to find an explanation for the crime, the textual signifier will resist becoming a fixed meaning, making each case ultimately unsolvable. Coupled with the audience's tendency toward formulaic storytelling, stories of reasoning showcase the mechanics of surplus enjoyment rooted in popular culture, which may explain the widespread dismissive attitudes toward cozy mysteries as a genre, including those held by Poe himself.

4. Conclusion

From a Lacanian perspective, the way Poe constructs detective stories suggests that the individual puzzle they propose leads to a broader system of signification. Lacan, in his analysis of "The Purloined Letter," argues that the letter lacks a hidden meaning. Instead, it functions as a signifier, and its movement determines which subjects can pursue it. The specific meaning of the letter is irrelevant, but its position in the itinerary of the signifier and the symbolic relationships it forms are significant (Lacan & Mehlman, 1972). Meanwhile, Žižek's idea of surplus enjoyment explains why this structure is so engaging in detective stories. The fascination is not mainly about the solution itself, but about the interpretation that precedes it. The final reveal rarely fully satisfies the interpretive desire it sparks because the true pleasure in detective fiction comes from the ongoing flow of desire rather than a definitive, final meaning (Žižek, 2012).

The stories of reasoning portrayed by Poe, in this sense, reveal what is at the heart of this genre: a structural paradox. Both stories assure us of the re-establishment of rational order, but the interpretive process that results in it is always more than the explicative process that concludes it. Repetition of the narratives is, therefore, a form of staging in the detective story where closure does not actually end interpretation but instead returns it to action. What makes the genre captivating may not be the success of rational deduction but the symbolic economy through which the promise of meaning continually ignites the reader's desire to unveil it.

Tzvetan Todorov notes that detective fiction has a two-layer structure with two interconnected stories - the crime story and the investigation. The latter re-creates the former retrospectively, systematizing scattered hints into an expository series that confers the appearance of coherence upon our day-to-day world (Todorov, 1977). However, this reconstruction never completely matches the event it claims to explain, because the crime remains accessible despite the story's efforts to recover it. Peter Brooks' description of narrative desire offers a thorough explanation for why this characterization is so captivating. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks argues that it is narrative action, or a subset of desires, that drives both the text and the reader toward a specific expected outcome, since meaning is created by the temporal progression of the plot rather than by the events alone (Brooks, 1992). However, this push toward the conclusion never fully satisfies the desire that drives it. This pattern is especially evident in detective fiction. The solution to the mystery may seem to be the answer, but the interpretive process that leads to that conclusion is always more complex than the explanation itself.

Consequently, the enduring significance of Poe's detective tales transcends their historical origins, shaping the very narrative structure of detective fiction that persists today. In these stories, the detective's role is to restore order and unveil the truth behind the crime. Yet, the explanations offered are never entirely definitive, often relying on framing and rigorous deduction. This tension embodies a broader modern struggle: the belief that reason can make sense of chaos, juxtaposed with the understanding that such explanations are inherently incomplete. The genre's lasting appeal, therefore, lies not only in its clues and solutions but also in its exaggerated depiction of the human longing to find meaning in a world that resists full understanding.

Conflicts of Interest

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