To Reason Unreasonably—On the Undercurrent of Irrationality in Edgar Allan Poe's Detective Stories[*]

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It is generally believed that Edgar Allan Poe's detective stories feature the ratiocination of C. Auguste Dupin, a detective Poe has created. However, this paper aims to demonstrate that there is actually an undercurrent of irrationality in Poe's detective stories. First of all, ratiocination, by definition, refers to inference, or deductive rules. It is also a type of the Enlightenment thinking that is closely related to reason or rationality. In detective fiction, it is the detective's ability to analyze the clues and reason out the truth. It is true that Dupin's ratiocination predominates in Poe's detective stories. However, a closer look will reveal that Dupin's ratiocinative processes in these stories are in fact blended with his speculation or imagination, namely, elements of irrationality. That is, beneath Dupin's seemly seamless ratiocinative model is indeed an undercurrent of irrationality. To find out the origin of this undercurrent, we have to research the historical background of Poe's detective stories. In the era of Poe's detective stories, the Enlightenment is the dominant thinking, while there is also a resistant force developing at the same time, Gothicism. The Enlightenment puts a premium on reason; in contrast, Gothicism is often equated with irrationality, whose manifestations include horror or imagination. Poe, who is deemed as the "romantic ironist", is a writer who is uniquely capable of making two statements with opposite meanings simultaneously. So as he indicates that ratiocination will lead to the truth in his detective stories, he may as well implies that imagination or speculation will also fulfill the same purpose. In addition, Poe excels in absorbing contraries; thus, he infuses both rationality and irrationality into his detective stories. For Poe, the latter has to be subdued by the former. As a consequence, the former plays a pivotal role in Poe's detective stories, while the latter ends up as an undercurrent.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, C. Auguste Dupin, ratiocination(-ive), irrationality

Though his *[Poe's]* streams of influence flowed largely underground for several decades, they fed not only Doyle's work but that of countless later writers. (Rzepka & Horsley, 2010, p. 5)

Murder makes a mess in a clean place. Stories about murder are therefore stories as much about dealing with messes as about deciphering clues. (Trotter, 1991, p. 71)

There is a reason for rules… I didn't teach them because I liked to hear myself talk! I taught them because they work! (*Mother's Day*, 2010)

Introduction

As we all know, Edgar Allan Poe has single-handedly founded the genre of detective fiction. To be more precise, Poe may not be the one who authored the first detective story in our literary history, but he is definitely the father of this particular genre (Alewyn, 1983; Wrong, 1946; Huang, 2016).[1] Above all, Poe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, has influenced the countless detective fiction writers that came after him, as the quote of Rzepka above indicates. In addition, Peter Hühn (1997) had stated, "Through his investigations, the detective retrieves the hidden story of the crime…" (p. 40). Hühn believes that detective fiction involves how a detective has discovered the truth of a crime. As far as Poe is concerned, ratiocination, or the process of making inferences, is the only way to such a truth, for when he first created the "crime-solving protagonist", C. Auguste Dupin, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842), and "The Purloined Letter" (1845), he referred to the three stores as "tales of ratiocination" (Lee, 2010, p. 370). Even so, a number of recent critics have begun to doubt whether ratiocination is the only underlying principle of Poe's detective stories. Instead, they believe that these stories may have an undercurrent of irrationality. This paper aims to locate and dissect this undercurrent. Hopefully, a new perspective on Poe's detective stories will be proffered.

About "Ratiocination"

As I have stated above, ratiocination is the core of Poe's detective stories. Therefore, there is a need to give a lucid and precise definition to "ratiocination" before the ratiocinative pattern of Poe's detective stories can be examined. To ratiocinate means "to calculate or to reason" ("ratiocinate" Def. 168, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1987); the ratiocination means "the process of reasoning, or a conclusion arrived at by reasoning" ("ratiocination" Def. 168, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1987) . As for the word ratiocinative, it means "characterized by, given to, or expressive of ratiocination" ("ratiocinative" Def. 168, *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1987). By these definitions, ratiocination may be regarded as synonymous with inference, which, in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is defined as "in logic, derivation of conclusions from given or premises by any acceptable form of reasoning. Inferences are commonly drawn by deduction, which, by analyzing valid argument forms, draws out the conclusions implicit in their premises…" (p. 308). Here, a key word is highlighted, "deduction", which *Encyclopedia Britannica* has given such a definition:

> a rigorous proof, or derivation, of one statement (the conclusion) from one or more statements (the premises); i.e., a chain of statements, each of which is either a premise or a consequence of a statement occurring earlier in the proof. (p. 954)

By the definitions above, ratiocination is equivalent to (analytical) reasoning and synonymous with inference or deduction. If so, the ratiocinative pattern is basically a deductive procedure or an inferential model. Most of all, by the definitions of deduction or inference given above, to ratiocinate is to draw out conclusions

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[1] In the second chapter of my Ph.D. dissertation, I have given a detailed account of the origin of the detective genre. Firstly, E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1818 story, "*Das Fräulein von Scuderi*", perfectly fits the definition of detective fiction. This story predates Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" by a quarter of a century. In addition, there are certain examples in ancient literatures that can typify detective fiction. In the case of the former, however, Richard Alewyn reminds us that it is no more than "a matter of a lucky bull's eye"; as for the case of the latter, E. M. Wrong has informed us that in spite of the emergence of these stories, "the art of detective fiction lay for centuries untouched, and its effective history is crowded into the last eighty years". Based on the above, I have concluded, "Poe was not the first detective story writer but definitely the progenitor of the detective genre".

on the basis of given information, or premises; it is an act of analysis and a process of reaching a conclusion. The conclusions drawn out are implicit while the premises or given statements are explicit.

If ratiocination refers to a process of inferring or reasoning out the truth, then it has to be closely linked to the Enlightenment, which was deeply rooted in the 17th century USA:

> The massive Western intellectual reorientation known as the Enlightenment that began to emerge in the middle of the seventeenth century rested principally on two revolutionary ideas: that it was possible to understand the universe through the use of human faculties and that such understanding could be put to use to make society more rational and humane. In America a moderate version of the first of these ideas gradually entered the intellectual mainstream with little overt opposition. (Hollinger & Capper, 2006, p. 95)

That is, the Enlightenment features the use of human faculties, especially the reason, to understand the universe. In order to achieve this goal, one must put to good use the ratiocinative model stated above. That is, by using one's human faculties, one will be able to gather large quantities of information, which, after logically and rationally sorted out, will lead to a better understanding of the universe (In a way, such an understanding is ratiocinated or reasoned out).

In a way, ratiocination is a type of thinking that can be equated with rationality or reason. As we all know, such thinking can be traced back to Francis Bacon (1561-1626), John Locke (1632-1704), and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and it is based on empiricism. Above all, as it gradually took root in the American intellectual mainstream, the American education was also under the influence of the Enlightenment. Back then, the Enlightenment-influenced curriculum "stressed the value of knowledge for the individual. Although civic responsibility and moral conduct were of importance, the greater matter for consideration was the student's ability to think and reason in a rational and independent manner" (Owens, 2011, p. 541). Besides, there has been evidence showing that "these Enlightenment works *[then]* were by far the most widely read and distributed books at the school; whereas many works of religious nature appear to have been rarely, if ever, used" (Kondayan, 1978, p. 439, *italics mine*). In other words, by the agency of education, the Enlightenment was already inscribed in the fabric of the US society at that time.

It is against this background where Poe composed his detective stories. Besides, it also explains why detective fiction has long been deemed as "a child of the Enlightenment" because it aims to "explain reality by methodically collecting and logically ordering facts" (Alewyn, 1983, p. 68). Indeed, the ratiocinative pattern or the deductive procedure has laid the foundation for Poe's detective stories. As a matter of fact, it is no coincidence that the detective fiction genre was spawned in America and took its root in England because, in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, deduction has constantly been employed (Lee, *The Door to Detective Fiction*, p. 132). Applied to detective fiction, ratiocination takes the form of a detective's investigative skills, or to be more specific, how the detective analyzes the clues (s)he has gathered and figures out the truth on the basis of them. A clue is the so-called "given information" above; it is "the trace(s) of guilt which the murderer leaves behind" (Rodell, 1946, p. 264). Rodell (1946) further argued:

> A good clue, then, is one which does in fact point in the right direction, but which seems at first to point in the wrong direction…if the clue is not to be elusive in itself, a definite label can be attached…if it is to be clue whose function is not immediately apparent—great care must be given the description of it…the author may bury the clue among a number of equally casual things which have no great significance. (pp. 264-271)

To reason out the truth, a detective has to discern clues from irrelevant or insignificant details, or the so-called "red herrings". Categorizing and deciphering them, a detective will readily be on his way to the truth

(In the beginning of the paper is a quote of David Trotter, which is about what a murder is like and how it should be solved. In fact, Trotter's statement is implicative of the observation above: while looking into a murder, a detective must look for clues in a mass of information, synthesize and analyze them before he can get to the truth).

The Ratiocinative Pattern in Poe's Detective Stories

As ratiocination is the core of Poe's detective stories, Dupin, the detective, has to be an embodiment of pure rationality or reason. In Poe's detective stories, Dupin is hardly a round character; he is primarily characterized by his inferential capability. "The Murders in Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" are replete with instances of Dupin's ratiocination. "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is a detective story that barely has any action because it is composed mainly of Dupin's lengthy reasoning. One typical example would be how Dupin rules out the possibility that the murder is committed by a bunch of thugs and determines that it is one single man's work:

> But would a number of men have put themselves to the superfluous trouble of taking down a fence, for the purpose of dragging through it a corpse which they might have lifted over any fence in an instant? Would a number of men have so dragged a corpse at all as to have left evident traces of the dragging…
>
> My inference is this. The solitary murderer, having borne the corpse for some distance…by means of the bandage hitched around its middle, found the weight, in this mode of procedure, too much for his strength. He resolved to drag the burthen—the evidence goes to show that it was dragged. (Poe, 1944, pp. 143-144)

The quoted passage is characteristic of Dupin's inferential procedure: First, a reasonable doubt is raised. Then, it helps to modify or even falsify the previous hypothesis. At last, the conclusion is reached, or the truth is reasoned out based on the clues or the evidence.

The same procedure is implemented in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". In the story, Dupin notices the clues of the "very thick tresses—of gray human hair" and the "fragments of the flesh of the scalp—sure token of the prodigious power which had been exerted in perhaps half a million of hairs at a time". And "the head *[of the old lady]* absolutely severed from the body: the instrument was a mere razor" (Poe, 1944, p. 78, *italics mine*). Then:

> If now, in addition to all these things, you have properly reflected upon the odd disorder of the chamber, we have gone so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification. What result, then has ensued? (Poe, 1944, p. 79)

On the basis of the clues, Dupin concludes that the murderer in this "locked-room mystery" is a "large fulvous Ourang-Outang" (Poe, 1944, p. 80).

Poe's "The Gold-Bug" (1843) is an even more typical example of how clues are interpreted to lead to the truth, though it only fits the loosest definition of a detective story because a hidden treasure may be a mystery but no crime at all. However, how the ciphers are decoded in the story can perfectly instantiate Poe's ratiocinative pattern (Huang, 2016; Peeples, 1998)[2]. The code in the story is:

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[2] In my Ph.D. dissertation, I give such a definition to detective fiction, "A detective novel refers to a fictional story that deals thematically with a crime as well as how it is solved by a detective or someone like a detective". By this definition, a few of Poe's stories, such as "Thou Art the Man" (1844), "The Oblong Box" (1844), and "The Gold-Bug" should not be regarded as detective stories, though they may deal with ratiocinative processes. Regarding "Thou Art the Man", Scott Peeples echoes my point of view, believing that it is not a detective story because the character of the detective is not emphasized.

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Figure 1.

And "then from what is known of Kidd, I could not suppose him capable of constructing any of more abstruse cryptographs. I made up my mind, at once, that this was of a simple species…" (Poe, 1944, pp. 35-36). William Legrand (the detective) deciphers the first clue and comes to his first conclusion. Legrand later states, "You observe there are no divisions between the words…But, there being no division, my first step was to ascertain the predominant letters, as well as the least frequent" (Poe, 1944, pp. 36-37). By so doing, Legrand makes his inference:

> Now in English, the letter which most frequently occurs is *e*…As our predominant character is 8, we will commence by assuming it as the e of the natural alphabet. To verify this supposition, let us observe if the 8 be seen often in couples—for *e* is doubled with great frequency in English…In the present instance we see it doubled no less than five times, although the cryptograph is brief. (Poe, 1944, p. 37)

Legrand has demonstrated how a standard deductive procedure works: The main premises are: "in English, the letter which most frequently occurs is *e*", "our predominant character is 8", "let us observe if the 8 be seen often in couples", and "*e* is doubled with great frequency in English". Based on the four premises, Legrand has come to the conclusion: In the cryptogram, 8 is *e*. Following the same procedure, Legrand goes on with his inference:

> Now, of all words in the language, "the" is most usual; let us see, therefore, whether there are not repetitions of any three characters, in the same order of collocation, the last of them being 8. If we discover repetitions of such characters, so arranged, they will most probably represent the word "the". Upon inspection, we find no less than seven such arrangements, the characters being; 48. We may, therefore, assume that represents *t*, 4 represents h, and 8 represents *e*—the last being now well confirmed. Thus a great step has been taken. (Poe, 1944, p. 38)

Basically, Legrand has used the deductive method in its simplest form: by comparing the code with the English language and considering the frequency of the use of certain English alphabets and words, Legrand has learned the meanings of certain units of the code. On this basis, "we arrive at the word 'tree'…and the word 'through'…this discovery gives us three new letters, *o, u,* and *g*, represented by ‡,? , and 3….two new characters, *i* and *n*, represented by 6 and *❋" (p. 39). At last, Legrand cracks the cryptogram, giving them "the full translation of the characters upon the parchment, as unriddled". Here it is:

> A good glass in the bishop's hotel in the devil's seat forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes northwest and by north main branch seventh limb east side shoot from the left eye of the death-head a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out. (Poe, 1944, p. 40)

The Undercurrent of Irrationality in Poe's Detective Stories

So far, it may seem obvious that Poe's ratiocinative pattern is composed of a set of deductive rules. Now that Poe's detective stories thematicize ratiocination, it seemly stands to reason that as far as Poe is concerned, these rules must work (just as the quote from the 2010 film, *Mother's Day*, reads). However, as I have mentioned in the beginning of the paper, such a viewpoint has been seriously impugned lately; it is thought that

beneath the surface of ratiocination in Poe's detective stories is actually an undercurrent of irrationality. Take "The Purloined Letter" for instance:

> I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. (Poe, 1944, p. 171)

First, in the story, "For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I *[Dupin]* have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—Hotel" (Poe, 1944, p. 158), but Dupin comes up with nothing. Thus, Dupin, using his ratiocinative ability, reasons out the whereabouts of the stolen letter. Perfect as Dupin's inference may seem, a closer look at it will reveal that Dupin's ratiocination is not founded on any clue he's gathered but on his own conjecture. To be more precise, while the standard ratiocinative method has to be premised on deductive principles, or pure Reason, Dupin, in the passage above, has shown neither of the above. Rather, he has built his conclusion, "he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity", upon his own speculation, "*[Minister D would]* despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment", rather than any information he's acquired with his "human faculties". Clearly, it is a counterexample of a standard reasoning process. That is, though Dupin's inference ought to be made rationally, the element of irrationality does stand out.

Here is another example from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue":

> It is possible—indeed it is far more than probable—that he was innocent of all participation in the bloody transactions which took place. The Ourang-Outang may have escaped from him. He may have traced it to the chamber; but, under the agitating circumstances which ensued, he could never have recaptured. It is still at large. (Poe, 1944, p. 81)

The above is Dupin's inference which can supposedly exonerate the Frenchman, and it is based on one single lead, "the expression, '*mon Dieu!*'…an expression of remonstrance or expostulation" (p. 81). However, identifying the "*mon Dieu!*"(My God!) as a remonstrative or expostulatory utter will inevitably entail a subjective conjecture. Not only is it no compelling proof at all but also it is, at its very best, "an educated guess". Even Dupin himself realizes it, so he concludes, "I will not pursue these guesses…We will call them guesses, then, and speak of them as such" (p. 81). Thus, as we can see, Dupin's supposedly rational reasoning is in fact adulterated with elements of irrationality.

Such elements of irrationality are equally conspicuous in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", which, as mentioned above, is characteristic of Dupin's fantastic inferences:

> If this was accident, it was not the accident of *a gang*. We can imagine it only the accident of an individual. Let us see. An individual has committed the murder. He is alone with the ghost of the departed…He is *alone* with the dead. He trembles and is bewildered. Yet there is a necessity for disposing of the corpse. He bears it to the river, and leaves behind him the other evidences of his guilt…His sole thought is immediately escape.
>
> "But how with a gang?" Their number would have inspired them with confidence…Their number, I say, would have prevented the bewildering and unreasoning terror which I have imagined to paralyze the single man. Could we suppose an oversight in one, or two, or three, this oversight would have been remedied by a fourth. They would have left nothing behind them; for their number would have enabled them to carry *all* at once. (Poe, 1944, pp. 142-143)

At first glance, the passage above comprises Dupin's impressive ratiocination; he has drawn a seemly marvelous inference that the murder of Marie Rogêt has been committed by a single man rather than a gang. Let us dissect Dupin's reasoning process. First, Dupin has reached this conclusion, "If this was accident, it was

not the accident of *a gang*". And the evidence supporting this conclusion is "the traces of a struggle", or to be more precise, "the struggle of so violent and so obstinate a nature as to have left the 'traces' apparent" (p. 141). Based on this piece of crucial evidence, Dupin has begun to infer, or to be exact, imagine this case scenario: One single man, frightened by the murder he's just committed, flees from the crime scene and indiscreetly leaves all the evidence. In addition, it is from this very lead that Dupin rules out the possibility that a gang could not have committed this horrific crime in a group, because a group of perpetrators could not have panicked so terribly that they end up leaving all these traces behind.

On the surface, the above seems to exemplify a standard ratiocinative process Poe holds so dear in his detective stories. However, a careful scrutiny of it will instantly reveal that it is not so flawless but actually has a loophole. The major question we should ask is, "How does Dupin eliminate the possibility that a gang is responsible for this murder?" First, Dupin has learned the testimony of Madame Deluc, who "points especially to the presence of *a gang* in the vicinity of the thicket, at or about the epoch of the murder" (Poe, 1944, p. 145). Judging from Madame Deluc's statement, the media believes that they are to blame. Dupin throws discredit on the media's theory, so he turns to the possibility of a solo crime. While Dupin's inference seems to be corroborated by his observation of the crime scene; however, he literally jumps to a conclusion by "imagining" what he thinks has really happened! Imagination, as we all know, is irrational in essence. As a consequence, we can know for sure that there is indeed an undercurrent of irrationality in Poe's "ratiocinative tales" (At this point, we can't help wondering, "Dupin has never bothered to look into the identities of the gang members… What if one or two members in the gang have murdered Marie Rogêt, and the members happen to b be novice criminals, who have such an irresistible inclination to panic after having committed such a devilish crime?").

As a matter of fact, there is ample textual evidence of the undercurrent of irrationality in Poe's detective stories,[3] and this undercurrent can be schematized as follows:
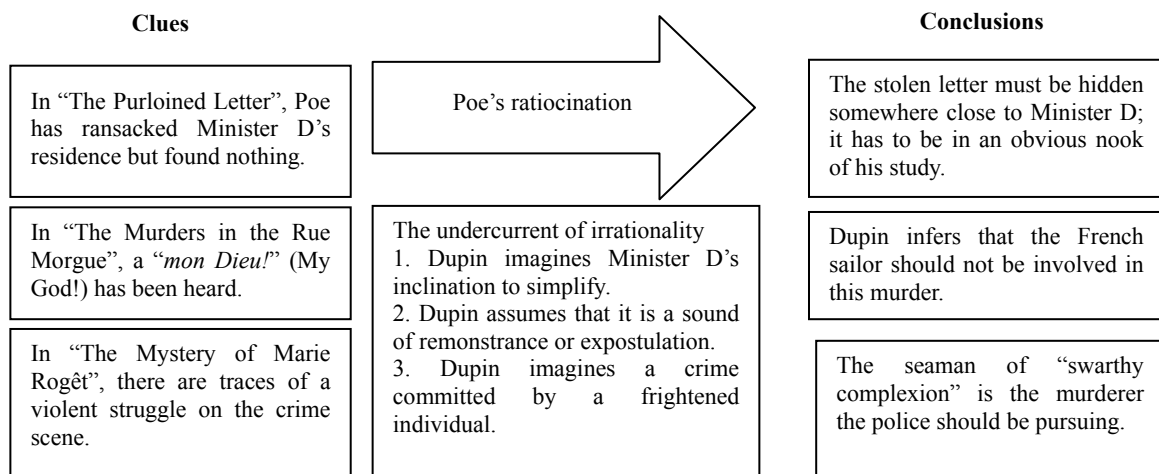
Clues		Conclusions
In "The Purloined Letter", Poe has ransacked Minister D's residence but found nothing.	Poe's ratiocination	The stolen letter must be hidden somewhere close to Minister D; it has to be in an obvious nook of his study.
In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", a "*mon Dieu!*" (My God!) has been heard.	The undercurrent of irrationality 1. Dupin imagines Minister D's inclination to simplify. 2. Dupin assumes that it is a sound of remonstrance or expostulation. 3. Dupin imagines a crime committed by a frightened individual.	Dupin infers that the French sailor should not be involved in this murder.
In "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", there are traces of a violent struggle on the crime scene.		The seaman of "swarthy complexion" is the murderer the police should be pursuing.

Figure 2.

[3] In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", there is another instance of this undercurrent. At the foot of the lightning-rod, Dupin has found "a small piece of ribbon", which "has evidently been used in tying the hair in one of those long queues of which sailors are so fond. Moreover, this knot is one which few besides sailors can tie, and is peculiar to the Maltese". Above all, Dupin believes that this piece of ribbon "could not have belonged to either of the deceased". Dupin's inference about the origin of this ribbon remains remarkably impressive, but there is no explaining why he knows for sure that either of the victims in this murder is the owner of the ribbon. That is to say, it is a purely conjectural statement, from which Dupin reasons out the truth of this case. In other words, Dupin's rational inference here is similarly built upon his irrational speculation.

Historicize This Undercurrent of Irrationality

In a standard inferential model, one should draw his or her conclusion on the basis of the clues. However, the schema above simply indicates that Poe's so-called "ratiocinative pattern" seems like a considerably substandard reasoning process. Ratiocination ought to guarantee a rational way to the truth, the truth, however, is sometimes reasoned out irrationally. That is, underneath a seemly well-structured ratiocinative pattern is actually an undercurrent of irrationality (In a way, Dupin simply "reasons unreasonably" in the detective stories, as the title of the paper suggests). This undercurrent is imagination in essence, as Laura Saltz (1995) recognized Dupin's ratiocinative capability as "an act of imagination" (p. 253). Nancy Harrowitz is more explicit. In "The Body of the Detective Model", she doubts whether the true nature of Poe's ratiocination is purely deductive. As a matter of fact, she would rather regard it as what Charles S. Peirce terms "abduction", which is "the step in between a fact and its origin; the instinctive perceptual jump allows the subject to guess an origin which can be tested out to prove or disprove the hypothesis" (Harrowitz, 1983, pp. 181-182). Stephen Rachman (1995) had summed up Peirce's definition of abduction as "a conjectural model that allows theorizing to take place, a kind of educated guessing" (p. 55).[4] On a technical level, both Harrowitz and Rachman seem to be saying that Poe does not exactly follow the orthodox deductive method to the letter in designing the schemes of his detective stories. And it is on this basis that they articulate for the discrepancy between Dupin's ratiocinative pattern and the solution of the case. By "discrepancy", I mean the gap between the clues and the truth, which is supposed to be gapped by ratiocination (rationality) but actually skipped by speculation or imagination (irrationality).

As discussed in the previous section, ratiocination is a product of the Enlightenment; it is closely correlated with Reason and may be traced back to the Lockean empiricism. In "Thinking Historically About Diversity", Christopher S. Grenda (2006) points out that "various eighteenth-century Americans read Locke and his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) was part of eighteenth-century American higher education" (p. 570). For Locke, culture must assume a role in moral education, or to be more specific, in inculcating virtue/perceived good in individuals. This is how such an inculcation works: making sure that each individual's mind, after gaining direct experiences, should prioritize them in the correct order. This ability to prioritize data is ratiocination; above all, it is a pivot of the Enlightenment education. However, it is noteworthy that the movement of Gothicism is simultaneous with the Enlightenment. As a matter of fact, Gothicism, which aims to invoke readers' horror, is a resistant undercurrent in the Enlightenment era. Associated with imagination, Gothicism focuses on irrationality, while the Enlightenment features rationality. Punter (1996) observed, "Gothic was…opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilized values and a well-regulated society" (p. 5). Rosemary Jackson (1981) also thought that gothic, or any other literary fantasy, "has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar, and apparently 'new,' absolutely 'other' and different" (p. 8). This is precisely how readers' fear is induced; their horror wells up when they see rationality broken down into pieces and recombined into irrationality, which is so strange and unfamiliar to them. A perfect instance would be Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, whose "narrative gestures frequently toward pervasive anxieties about the individual's capacity for common sense and self-control", namely, "the ideological bedrock of the Enlightenment promise

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[4] In fact, Rachman invokes Harrowitz's view and Peirce's definition of abduction to support his argument about Poe's plagiarism. He states, "Through a happy coincidence of meaning 'abduction' is also kidnapping, the root meaning of plagiarism". This is a conclusion he's drawn on the grounds that the "psychology and projection invoked in Poe's fashioning of a double to expose plagiarism is the same that led Dupin to expose his double in the purloining of the 'letter'".

of the free individual's role in the common good" (Savoy, 2002, p. 172). Brown's *Wieland* has informed us of how the Enlightenment values may be inverted, recombined, or impugned in the gothic tradition.

We have to note that Poe composes his detective stories in the face of both the Enlightenment and Gothicism. Shawn Rosenheim has argued, "Poe's analytical sublime contains the seeds of its own doing". He later explains, "*[His detective stories intensify]* the shock of the narrative by increasing the contrast between the narrative's ratiocinative calm and the brutality to follow" (1995, p. 165, *italics mine*). Rosenheim has noted that in Poe's detective stories, there are two opposite elements, namely ratiocination and horror, or to be more precise, the rationality of the Enlightenment and the irrationality of the Gothicism. Raymond Immerwahr (1969) had classified Poe as "the Romantic Ironist" because "he is likely to mean at the same time both what he seems to be saying and its opposite" (p. 665). Thompson (1973) defined the term "the Romantic Irony" as "a merger", or "a transcendental mastery of the world and oneself through simultaneous detachment and involvement" (p. 23). To sum up, Poe is capable of combining and simultaneously presenting two contraries from a transcendental position.

If Poe has absorbed both rationality and irrationality in his detective stories, it is no wonder that there is an undercurrent of irrationality beneath Dupin's ratiocinative processes. Closely tied with reason, ratiocination offers us a way to the truth. It would seem that Poe has conveyed this message in his detective stories. However, as "the Romantic Ironist", while confirming the relation between ratiocination and the truth, Poe might as well indicate that this relation could simultaneously be a disrelation, and that irrationality could also be another way to the truth. Thus, it makes perfect sense that there is an undercurrent of irrationality in Poe's detective stories.

At this point, it is necessary to shed more light on what Poe thinks of reason and imagination, in order to adjust my dialectical focus. David Ketterer (1979) noticed that Poe actually distrusts reason and trusts imagination because imagination is "the only avenue to a perception of ideality and reason being largely responsible for man's state of deception" (p. 238). However, by no means does it indicate that reason has no place at all in Poe's stories. Janice MacDonald (1997) argued, "The crux of Poe's critical stance is that he unites two opposing forces of rationalism and imagination" (p. 65). She later elaborates on her viewpoint:

> Poe…imposed standards of quality onto tales of gothic and sensational horror. No longer could writers indulge in horrific sequences for sensation's sake alone…By deducing a logical reason for this terrifying action, he challenged writers to be responsible for their creative powers…It is important to note that Poe did not dismiss elements of the sensational; by using horror and intrigue to tell a story of rationality, he made it impossible for readers to be satisfied with the old formula. (p. 65)

If readers are dissatisfied with "the old formula", it means that Poe must have created "a new formula", about which MacDonald draws on Victor Erlich's (1965) definition of parody, a "reorganization, a 'regrouping of the old elements'" (p. 226). First, it is essential to note that MacDonald here has more or less equated the author's imagination with the author's ability to invoke sensational horror or use intrigue, or to be more precise, how the author appeals to irrationalities. Therefore, when speaking of how Poe unites rationalism and imagination, MacDonald has also explained how Poe thinks such a union could be made possible: imagination has to be checked by rationalism; detective fiction (such as Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt") may incorporate elements of gothic horror, but it has to be built upon logic reasoning. This is what the "reorganization or the regrouping of the old elements" should be like. Besides, in Poe's opinion, this is also how writers should "be responsible for their creative powers". If imagination must be

subdued by rationalism, it means that the latter is the founding principle of a detective story, and that the former becomes an invisible force that stealthily deflects the detective's thinking from the orthodox ratiocinative route.

Edogawa Ranpo (1894-1965), the maestro of Japanese detective fiction (Fu, 2005),[5] basically concurs with MacDonald. Edogawa first affirms Poe's legacy as well as his trailblazing efforts in the tradition of detective fiction. Then, he looks into the historical background of Poe's detective stories, stating Poe lives in an era where gothic romances still prevail. As a result, horror naturally leaves a deep mark on his works. But in Poe's opinion, any works of horror and fantasy "have to be composed on the basis of mathematical reasoning". This is what Poe has done with his detective stories. Here, Edogawa echoes MacDonald's observation that in Poe's detective stories logic reasoning has to be put over horror. In addition, Edogawa (1987) added that Dupin, who can be regarded as "Poe's double", "is born in a realm of craziness" (pp. 11-30). First of all, there is some textual evidence in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" that can buttress up Edogawa's observation. In the beginning of the story, Dupin is portrayed as a gentleman with "a peculiar analytic ability", who tends "to take an eager delight in its exercise—if not exactly in its display—and did not hesitate to confess the pleasure thus derived" (Poe, 1944, p. 52). On the other hand, Dupin is also "a madman of a harmless nature", someone with "a freak of fancy" and "wild whims" (Poe, 1944, p. 51). Most of all, Edogawa has located the origin of the undercurrent of irrationality in Poe. As mentioned previously, Poe is able to absorb contraries; as a result, Dupin, Poe's double in his detective stories, exhibits both rationality and irrationality. As Poe has infused both horror and rationality into his detective stories, Dupin exercises both logic reasoning and wild imagination. If the former, which is equated with rationality, is ground rule for detective fiction, the latter, which is synonymous with irrationality, has to be a hidden factor in it. While the former lays the foundation of detective fiction, the latter will naturally end up as an undercurrent, or a submerged force that occasionally pulls Dupin's inference from strict deductive rules.

Conclusion

Douglas Thompson (1946) began his essay "Masters of Mystery" by stating, "In its simplest form the detective story is a puzzle to be solved, the plot consisting in a logical deduction of the solution from the existing data" (p. 129). And he concludes his essay by saying "The main ingredient must be logic. If there is to be sensation－and would not for worlds banish it－it should seem rather incidental" (p. 145). However, reading through Poe's detective stories, we realize that it's not exactly this case. It is true that we see the puzzles solved and Dupin's ratiocinative skills used in these stories. Ratiocination, a product of the Enlightenment, is correlated with Reason and comprises rigid deductive rules. However, there is sufficient textual evidence indicating that Dupin's ratiocination is blended with elements of irrationality, such as imagination and speculation. That is, Dupin seems to "reason unreasonably" in these detective stories. I term these elements "an undercurrent of irrationality". In this paper, I argue that this undercurrent can be historicized. First, while the Enlightenment is going at full throttle, there is also a resistant movement underway, Gothicism. The

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[5] Like Anglo-American detective fiction, Japanese detective fiction has followed a similar developmental route: from classical to hard-boiled. Bo, Fu states that in 1932, Edogawa Ranpo published his first detective story, not only laying the foundation for Japanese detective fiction but also ushering Japanese detective fiction into its classical period. Seishi Yokomizo (1902-1981), Takao Tsuchiya (1917-2011), Tetsuya Ayukawa (1919-2002), and many other brought classical detective fiction to its peak. In 1957, Seicho Matsumoto (1909-1992) published his first detective novel, *The Dot and the Line*, which primarily features the social realities of Japan after World War II. The success of *The Dot and the Line* ushered Japanese detective literature into its hard-boiled period.

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Enlightenment emphasizes rationality; in contrast, Gothicism highlights irrationality. Secondly, Poe is a "Romantic Ironist", which means that he can merge contraries. In addition, he can simultaneously utter two statements with opposite meanings. The identity of a Romantic Ironist helps to explain why there is an undercurrent of irrationality in his detective stories. On the one hand, when Poe intends for ratiocination to solve the case, he also implies that it does not necessarily lead to the truth. On the other hand, Poe has clearly absorbed both rationality and irrationality in his detective stories. For Poe, the former must keep the latter under control. If so, ratiocination becomes the main component of his detective stories, while irrationality ends up as an undercurrent.

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