

# “The Purloined Letter” by Edgar Allan Poe

(Sem-3, American Literature,  
Group A - Short Story)

First Lecture



# Contents:

Poe--  
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Characterization

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Framework



## Edgar Allan Poe :

- **Edgar Allan Poe** was born on January 19th 1809, and died on October 7<sup>th</sup> , 1849.
- Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre.
- He is widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the United States and of American literature as a whole, and he was one of the country's earliest practitioners of the short story.



# The Purloined Letter: Translation

## Characters:

- Narrator
- C. Auguste Dupin ["The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842) "The Purloined Letter" (1844)]
- Monsieur G
- Minister D

- Baudelaire translated it as "La Lettre Volée"
- Poe's "The **Philosophy of Composition**" (1846)
- Micheal Holquist's "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction" (1971)

## Purloin (v.)

mid-14c., "remove, misappropriate," from Anglo-French *purloigner* "remove," Old French *porloigner* "put off, retard, delay, drag out; be far away," from *por-* (from Latin *pro-* "forth;" see *pro-*) + Old French *loing* "far," from Latin *longe*, from *longus* "long".

• The epigraph "*Nihil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*" (Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than excessive cleverness) attributed by Poe to Seneca was not found in Seneca's known work. It is from Petrarch's treatise "De Remediis utriusque Fortunae". Poe probably took the reference from Samuel Warren's novel *Ten Thousand a-Year*.

• "Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault..."

- It is the third of his three detective stories featuring the fictional [C. Auguste Dupin](#), the other two being "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt".
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# Whodunit?

- “...a certain document of the last importance, has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession.” (p.2)
- 





Why is Poe the creator of the classical detective story?

✓ Joseph Wood Krutch: "Poe invented the detective story that he might not go mad." (Quoted in Howard Haycraft, Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story (New York, 1941), p.9).



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### Auguste Dupin

Dupin is a young, French, private detective, and the star of "The Purloined Letter."

### Monsieur G—

Monsieur G— is the prefect, or head, of the Paris police.

### The Narrator

The narrator is Dupin's friend and roommate.

### The Minister D—

The minister D— is the official villain of the piece.

### The Royal Lady

The royal lady is the victim, right? It's her letter that's stolen.

### The Other Royal Person

Okay, so here we're going to have a clear victim.

### S—

S— is one of the biggest mysteries of the story. This whole mess begins when he sends the...



## Summary of the Plot:

- Narrator and **Dupin** are meeting in a chamber in France.
- **Monsieur G** shows up explaining the case of the stolen letter, as well as explains how the police searched the entire hotel Minister D (suspect) was staying in.
- A month later Monsieur G returns with an announcement about the award for those who find the letter.
- Dupin reveals that he has the letter.

## To be continued...

- Dupin tries to explain to the narrator that he got the letter for the reward and to prove that the police were thinking too plainly in their investigation.
- He makes many theories and analogies about the psychological aspects behind actions, and that things can be predicted when studied closely.
- He reveals how he stole and replaced the letter at the hotel.

## EXPOSITION



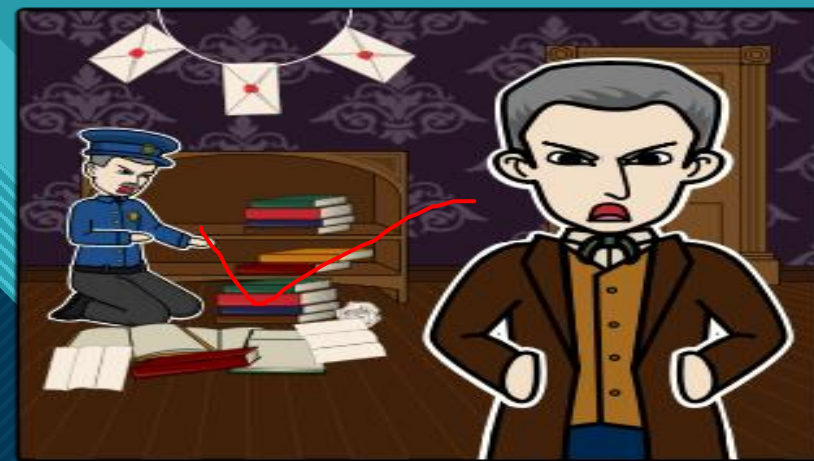
The Prefect of the Paris police goes to see C. August Dupin, a private eye, who recently helped him solve 'The Murders of Rue Morgue'. His new case is about a stolen letter!

## CONFLICT



A letter was stolen from a powerful lady. The main suspect is Minister D, a man who Dupin has bad blood with.

## RIISING ACTION



The prefect searches the minister's apartment and comes up empty. When he returns to see Dupin, the private eye gives the prefect the letter.

## CLIMAX



Dupin explains how he was able to think like the thief and recover the letter!

## FALLING ACTION



Dupin supplanted the letter with an identical, which reads, "So baneful a scheme, if not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes."

## RESOLUTION



Dupin is able to solve the case and get revenge for a wrong committed against him by the Minister.

# Structure:

## Exposition

- The letter is missing.

## Conflict

- Minister has done it.
- Why?
- What does he want to know?





## Rising Action:

- The Queens inability to act on the stolen letter due to blackmail.
- The Parisian police searching Minister D's premises.
- Large reward if letter is found
- Prefect returns one month later announcing reward was doubled



## Climax:

- When Dupin announced he had the stolen letter and traded reward for it
- Falling Action:
- Dupin explains how he got the letter
- mentions polices flaws and obliviousness by oversimplifying case

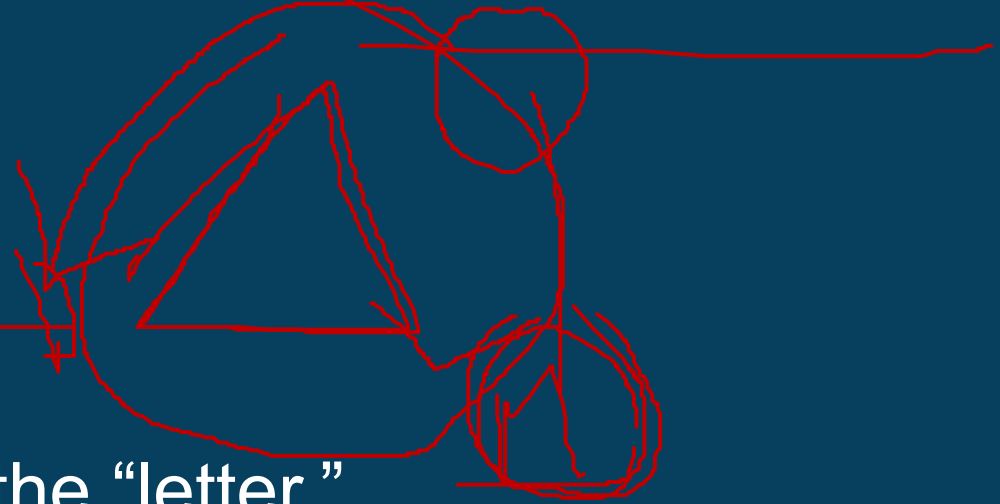


## Resolution/Denouement:

- Dupin explains his loyalty to queen and rivalry with Minister D reveals a clue is left within letter.

## “Whodunit”

- It is a complex, plot-driven variety of a detective story in which the puzzle regarding who committed the crime is the main focus.
- Recursive logically structure. Refers to many games: “**odd-even game**” and “**map –pointing game**.”
- Who wrote the letter?
- What is there in the letter?
- The content is missing.
- Basically it is about the “lack” of the “letter.”



**Thank You**

