

GROUP 5

Same author for both SF and DF

"How science is defined in texts of two different genres that are authored by the same person"

Texts:

SF: "The Facts in the case of M. Valdemar"

DF: "The Murders in Rue Morgue"

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Ishir: Hello, Everyone! I am Edgar Allan Poe, the American writer, poet, editor, literary critic, etc., etc., and obviously "the Pioneer of Scientific and Detective fiction." Recently, the Ouija UniverseTech has developed this very interesting "Interstellar Traveller", which enables one to travel across space. Coincidentally, I happened to come across this interesting class of ENG440: Topics in Literary Genres which deals with Detective Fiction and Scientific Fiction. Let me go in disguise and see what good they have to say about me.

[Enters a classroom where people are seated across a table. The class is about to begin. Poe enters the class as a guest lecturer.]

Ishir: Good Morning. I am your Guest Lecturer for today. Let's explore the genres of Scientific Fiction and Detective Fiction by the same author and explore the question of how science is defined in these texts. Well, I believe that Edgar Allan Poe will be the best choice of Author for this purpose. So, let's begin our discussions on "The Facts in the case of M. Valdemar" and "The Murders in Rue Morgue".

Acanksha: Let's start by seeing "How Science functions in these texts?" Beginning with the content, the scientific knowledge system usually talks about the 'what' of the knowledge. It usually deals with the scientific facts that we can recognize and data which is presented or observed throughout the story. In 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' the scientific content revolves around mainly the event of mesmerization happening, people doing it, their observations of M. Valdemar when he is put in trance and their knowledge about medical science which allows them to perform the mesmerization and observe M. Valdermar's body react to specifics.

Ananya: On a similar note, we see the story 'The Murder in Rue Morgue', where the scientific content is in terms of biological knowledge, like that of fingerprints, physical strength, and linguistics which they use to reason possibilities and solve the crime.

Madiha: Voice (linguistics) is another common element present in the texts. In 'The Facts about M. Valdemar', the analysis of Valdemar's voice, in which he mutters in the mesmeric trance state, is through the lens of experimentation where the characters observe the voice as part of the overall experiment of mesmerism being conducted.

Kavya: In the The Murders in Rue Morgue, we have the analysis of voices heard during the time of the murder and people trying to judge the language being spoken. The voices are being used to deduce the criminal or eliminate options, and are a part of the

investigation process. The difference in the usage of voice as an element in both the texts directly relates to the difference in genre where simply observing as part of the experiment hints towards a science fiction setting, while analysing the voices as a means to investigate an occurrence hints towards a detective fiction setting in the latter text.

Ishir: That was a good discussion on Content. What do you people have to say about the method of Knowledge Generation?

Swapnil: Oh, I could answer that for you. Dupin and P both rely on observations and prior knowledge, developing hypothesis to perform deduction and to study mesmerism respectively. Dupin hypothesises that the sailor was the orangutan's owner – he was not sure that this was the case, but went with his intuition, took a risk and placed an ad in the newspaper. This was a sort of experiment he conducted which could have resulted in the favourable outcome (the sailor showing up as the owner of the orangutan) or not.

Namgyal: Well, the narrator in the Facts of M. Valdemar also had a hypothesis – he expected that mesmerism would delay death, and he conducted an experiment to test this hypothesis as well as to find out more information, such as about the duration of such a delay. Therefore, in both texts, the characters come up with a hypothesis and conduct an experiment to test it, and in both cases, the experiment might provide evidence in support of or against their hypothesis. In either case, they learn something new.

Nupur: Oh, I have one more point in mind! In the detective fiction text, we go from general to specific, while in science fiction, we go from specific to general. Dupin lists general possibilities about the cause of the unidentified voice, the handprints, the body in the chimney, etc., and follows a process of elimination to deduce what happened in the specific situation he is observing. On other hand, P and co. observe what is happening to M Valdemar in particular, and make general deductions to generate knowledge about the impact of mesmerism at the point of death in general.

Swapnil: By the way, the way the two texts are paced and the amount of time it takes to arrive at the conclusions is also different. The facts are in front of Dupin already and so he is able to make deductions quickly. He, as a layperson solves the case in just a couple of days with just a single visit to the crime scene that had stumped professionals. This makes the detective fiction text more thrilling and romantic.

Madiha: Yeah and the science fiction text, the narrator mentions that he had had the idea for the experiment suddenly nine months prior, but the opportunity to carry out the experiment after a long time. There is a lot of progress suddenly on the day Valdemar was predicted to die, but even then there was a lot of waiting around involved. Then for seven months, M. Valdemar's condition remained exactly the same, but even during this time he was constantly under observation. Therefore, this text is more monotonous and progress is made in short bursts.

Ishir: Oh, I see. But what about the purpose of the text?

Acanksha: Both texts emphasise knowledge creation for personal enjoyment. Both P and Dupin gain 'pleasure' from their work/actions. However, this seemingly common element in the texts also functions differently. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin is involved in the case because it seems interesting to him, and uses his reasoning power because he gets pleasure out of solving such interesting puzzles.

Kavya: Yes! I agree. This can be seen in the statement said by Dupin- "Let us go to the house and see what we can see. ... And this will be interesting and give us some pleasure." Similarly, in the text - 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,' the narrator was carrying out the experiment to satiate his curiosity to understand how Mesmerism affects death, which can be seen by the statements said by the narrator - "There were other points to be ascertained, but these most excited my curiosity" and "My attention, for the last three years, had been repeatedly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism." The concept of pleasure in this text revolves around an increment of knowledge and piquing of curiosity of the characters.

Ishir: While we could easily see the difference on individual level in the terms of purpose. It is also important to look that how their method of generating knowledge also reflects the difference in purpose in the two genres. How will you deal with that?

Nupur: While solving the murders, Dupin was very attentive to the surroundings. When Dupin and the narrator visited the crime scene, Dupin was meticulously inspecting all the nearby houses including the murder house. He was exceptionally observant, which helped him infer facts about portions of the case and construct plausible hypotheses to learn more about the crime.

Namgyal: I agree with you. However, he does not seem to take any notes, nor discuss his thinking with the narrator until much later when he had already formed his theory about the cause of the murders. In fact, much of his thinking throughout the text happens

inside his own head. It can also be seen in the statement said by the narrator - "Dupin said nothing. I could see the cold look in his eyes which told me that his mind was working, working busily, quickly. I asked no questions." This shows that since Dupin's purpose of knowledge creation was his pleasure only, he didn't feel it necessary to involve the narrator in the process of making deductions from the observation. It was more like a single person driving the whole incident than the situation being driven by a group.

Acanksha: But, on the other hand, in the Facts of M. Valdemar, all individuals were making observations, while the medical student meticulously took notes about observations and facts during his experiment (as it says in the title) to record what was happening which were referred to later while P is recounting the facts to others. All the characters except the narrator in the experiments involved were doctors and nurses which symbolises the 'people of science'.

Ananya: Also, the narrator taking inputs from the others and discussing with them shows how the experiment was group-driven. The constant will of the narrator to perform the experiment in the presence of 'reliable' witnesses shows how important it was for the narrator for his experiment to be validated by the 'people of science'. This can be seen by the statement - "A male and a female nurse were in attendance; but I did not feel myself altogether at liberty to engage in a task of this character with no more reliable witnesses than these people, in case of sudden accident, might prove."

Madiha: So, here the purpose of science is to satiate curiosity (as opposed to thrill from solving puzzles), and so sharing knowledge with other professionals and taking their inputs is conducive to the purpose of generating new knowledge. Therefore, although the characters in both texts rely heavily on observation to generate knowledge, the observations are recorded only in the science fiction text. Further, the level of involvement of all parties in using the observations to generate knowledge is different - in one, knowledge generation is an individual pursuit, while in the other, it is a collective endeavour.

Kavya: In the text 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' science functions as a way to eliminate non-possibilities to arrive at what could be possible to ascertain the cause of death. as seen through statements - " we have put together the following ideas: strength more than human; wildness less than human; a murder without reason; horror beyond human understanding; and a voice which made no sound that men

could understand." Science is used to go back to a previous state by filtering existing knowledge to restore social order.

Namgyal: In the text 'The facts in the case of M. Valdemar,' Science can be seen functioning as the doorway for exploring the limits of what is possible, hence challenging the existing notion and definition of death. M. Valdemar keeps announcing he is dead, and does not seem to show signs of breathing or of blood circulation; however, his tongue was vibrating, and occasionally he spoke – things dead people don't generally do. P also mentions at one point, "It was evident that so far, death (or what is usually termed death) had been arrested by the mesmeric process", indicating that this case of 'death' did not fit its usual definition. Here, Science is used to generate previously-unknown knowledge to disrupt the natural order.

Swapnil: Also, if you guys noticed, in both texts, the characters show an indifferent attitude towards death. Dupin and P work closely with death but remain cold and disconnected throughout. On one hand, P conducts his experiment professionally, being cold and aloof even though his friend is dying. The doctors who had known M. Valdemar for a while also seemed indifferent to his death. To them, death is something interesting to be studied. In fact, the narrator picks M. Valdemar for his experiment because he has no relatives who would object to this appropriation of his death for science, and M. Valdemar too was excited at the prospect of his impending death being used for science.

Nupur: Yes! Dupin also solves the case analytically and detachedly, saying that going to the house and studying the gory murder will be interesting and pleasurable, which the narrator finds odd. To him, death is an interesting puzzle to unravel. Both protagonists viewed death as something interesting to be studied and not grieved over. They treated death indifferently and focused on their tasks – performing the scientific experiment and solving the seemingly unsolvable case, respectively.

Ishir : Well, that is what I am known for. [eye wink to audience]

Acanksha: Both texts have very different kinds of characters. In 'The Facts about M. Valdemar', the characters are all people of science – doctors, nurses, a medical student, and the narrator who is experienced with Mesmerism. All these people work together to investigate Valdemar's state even though they work in different fields.

Ananya: On the other hand, in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', Dupin and the narrators are both non-professionals, not shown to be related to the law or to science. Dupin merely enjoys solving a puzzle, and gains access to the crime scene because he happens to know a police officer. The police and Dupin are in competing positions—the Chief of police was not happy that the case had been solved by someone who is not a policeman, and Dupin also disparages methods used by the police.

Madiha: This also connects with the purpose of science in these texts: personal pleasure gained by solving a problem, which anyone can pursue, in the DF text, and using existing knowledge from various fields to generate new knowledge in the SF text, which requires knowledgeable and experienced people.

Swapnil: In the detective fiction text, the ending is complete as the crime is finally solved with all its intricacies explained by Dupin. The purpose of science in the detective fiction text is to solve a case and to arrive at a conclusion about who committed the murder and how, and this is reflected in the way all the loose ends are tied up in the text.

Nupur: Yeah and on the other hand, the science fiction text has a somewhat open ending. The end result is unexpected, and the ending is quite abrupt,. This reflects the purpose of science SF text, which is to generate more knowledge, and not to arrive at a particular result. More knowledge can always be generated and there is no neat 'end' to this process of knowledge generation.

Ishir:

Well that was an interesting discussion on both of Poe's works. I must say I'm impressed by the level of detail in which you guys discussed both the scientific fiction and detective fiction in the two texts.

To the audience: Just a food for thought, narrative manipulation is an important analysis tool. The SF text progresses in the forward direction with the time as reference, in contrast to the DF text which backtracks in time.

What if I had flipped the 'Rue Morgue' text with respect to time, and if the text had followed the actions of the orangutan in a forward direction? It would have become similar to a science fiction text, where there is nothing investigative happening. Tricked you guys!!