

This essay compares the genres of the dramatic monologue and detective fiction in terms of their contemporaneous development and respective reading processes. Drawing on narratological categories, it examines the emphasis in both genres on the withholding of information and the stimulation of the reader's desire to establish meaning and exert judgment. Despite these similarities in the reading process, the genres' epistemologies seem opposed: the relativist dramatic monologue clearly challenges the belief in absolute meaning, while the classic detective formula depicts the problematic process of arriving at an apparently unambiguous truth. On a subtler analysis, however, detective fiction echoes and diversifies the dramatic monologue's questioning of stable meaning. Both genres explore questions of relativism, both invite their readers to engage in modes of investigative reasoning and a problematized process of "solving," and both can be read as critiquing the literature of subjectivity and reflecting the transgression of norms in a society where key values are shifting. Considering the origins of both genres, the essay asks whether a further relationship might derive from the debt that their founding figures, Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Browning, owe to the Gothic and from their shared interest in the individual psyche.