
POE'S 'THE GOLD BUG' AS A TALE OF MYSTERY AND CRYPTOGRAPHY

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show Poe's tale "The Gold Bug" as a tale of mystery and Cryptography. Edgar Allan Poe was considered part of American Romantic Movement. He was best known for his tales of mystery and the macabre. He was one of the earliest American practitioners of the short story, and is generally considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. Poe influenced literature in the United States and around the world with his works.

Poe's "The Gold Bug" is a prize winning tale. It brought considerable recognition to him. It is one of the most popular stories in the world. The tale brings out the element of mystery and ratiocination based on Poe's interest in cryptography.

Keywords: mystery, ratiocination, hidden treasure, cryptography and puzzle - solving.

Introduction: Poe's interest in mystery, like many facts of literary history, tends to be considered apart from the philosophical and social conditions that produced it. The tales of mystery and ratiocination along with the tales of terror appeal to Poe's superb creativity in this direction. In the tales of ratiocination the readers are concerned not only with how the mystery is well kept but also with the imaginative process of the reasoned that leads to the reconstruction of the events of the case. The ratiocinative faculty of Poe is at its best in the three major tales, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter". As a tale of mystery and puzzle solving, "The Gold Bug" is one of Poe's most famous tales. Successful preservation of mystery and the following ratiocination are equally significant in this tale. There is fine drama involving incident, character and dialogue in the tale. It makes the tale very interesting. There is active reader-participation in this tale. Poe handles the element of mystery skillfully. This is, however, the kind of mystery that E. L. Mascall defines as, "being a puzzle" (18). A close analysis of character and incident brings out the element of mystery and ratiocination based on Poe's interest in cryptography.

The Gold Bug: In the first part of the tale, leading to the discovery of the hidden treasury, mystery is developed around the character of Legrand. In fact, the mystery operates at two levels: 1. The character of Legrand and his behavior, confusing the reader, 2. The mystery faced by the character himself in his search for the buried treasure.

In the beginning of the tale, the reader is impressed that Legrand has abnormal mind. He is said to have been belonged to an ancient "Huguenot Family". His character is presented from the point of view of the narrator and the Negro, Jupiter. Jupiter, the faithful servant of "Masa will", is deeply concerned his master's well being. He is much confused about his master's behavior and attributes it to the bite of the bug. In one occasion he says, "I'm being sartain dat

Masa will fin bit somewhere 'bout de lead by dat goole bug" (Quinn, 358).

The second part of the tale deals with the other level of the mystery which Legrand himself faced with and successfully solves. This mystery originates when Legrand accidentally discovers that he is in possession of a pirate's parchment that probably contains directions to a buried treasure. In fact, it is not the entomological specimen of the scar abacus (the "goole-bug" as Jupiter calls it) that is important for Legrand, but the piece of dirty paper picked up by Jupiter for holding the bug. The piece of dirty paper is a pirate's parchment. Jupiter describes the insect as 'goole-bug'. The word makes Legrand think of a chain of association ultimately connected with the hidden treasure. Legrand knows that the parchment is generally used for a record of something to be "long remembered and carefully preserved". When it accidentally gets heated, the figure of the death's - head becomes visible. The death's - head is the emblem of the pirates; in all engagements of the pirates the flag with that emblem is hoisted. On the heated parchment he discovers the figure of a kid at the corner of the slip, diagonally opposite to the spot where the death's - head is depicted. Thus the figure of the kid sounds to Legrand as a hieroglyphically signature and he connects with the pirate Captain Kidd whose name is commonly known. Many stories are there about the buried treasure somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean by Captain Kidd and his associates. Thus, Legrand confirms himself that the parchment containing the mysterious figure is in fact a cryptogram relating to that treasure. Legrand proceeds to solve the cryptogram assuming that it must be a simple one since Kidd could not have constructed the more abstruse cryptograms.

"The Gold Bug" is of a different order from detective tales of Poe, like "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter". According to Margaret Alterton and Hardin Craig, the tale is "Possibly the most perfect of all the ratiocinative stories always with the exception of the Murders in the Rue

Morgue” (cvi). Strictly speaking it is a case of cryptography preceded by a careful manipulation of mystery rather than of ratiocination as understood in the content of the detective tales. The unriddling of a cryptogram proceeds in a more prosaic way employing statistical analysis. The reader of a cryptogram has to weigh probabilities in choosing his readings and must possess an insight into the rationale of the language of ciphers. He does not have to indulge in any flights of imagination or intuitive flashes. Thus cryptography would be nearer to the mathematical faculty than to the poetic. The rationale in “The Gold Bug” is of this order. The tale is a remarkable combination of adventure, mystery and ratiocination. “The tale was rendered as a

tage presentation by Silas S. Steel, a prominent play Wright of Philadelphia and played at the Wahunt Street Theatre” (Quinn, 392). Poe was obviously happy when he called it “My most successful tale” (Letters, 253).

Conclusion: Poe does not employ the term “mystery” to categorize his tales. One may led to believe that tales of “mystery” and tales of “ratiocination” are identical in Poe’s work. In the detective story, once the mystery is solved and the readers’ rational faculty is given fullest play, the ‘effect’ appears. While analyzing the tales of mystery and ratiocination, it is worth to consider the kind of reader – response they ultimately evoke.

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