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**Cryptography and Humor in Edgar Allan Poe's  
"The Gold Bug"**

*An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for  
the "Master" Degree in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Civilization*

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# DEDICATION

The words will never express what the heart wants, the teary eyes will not show how much I love and how much I miss my dear cousins Sadek and Yassine who passed away leaving their pride of me behind . To them I dedicate the fruit of my efforts with a deep sorrow for their absence. To the two persons who always care about my happiness and my needs before theirs, my beloved mama and papa.

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# ABSTRACT

The focus of this research paper is in the literary field, such a study is important to shed light on cryptography and humor in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug". The research approach adopted in this work includes a literary analysis of "The Gold Bug" as an American Romantic short story. Thus, the findings from this research provide evidence that Edgar Allan Poe was not only specialized in gothic stories but he also succeeded in leaving a great impact in the reader's mind through humor as well as he introduced himself as a cryptographer.

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## *General Introduction*

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What is literature? This is a common question asked by almost all the teachers who spoon fed our knowledge these previous years, while one's answer as a student was "pieces of writings" but when thinking for a while, one recognized at that moment that his draft paper is a piece of writing as well as his exam sheet and copy book too, and the teachers' answer was always more specific and bound to the term "stylistic writings are literature". It had always been a companion to our researches and studies, a shelter for wonder, fantasy, mystery, historical background, vivid description and imagination. Literature is a journey when the reader travels to another world, encounters new cultures and swallows new ideas from the characters and their situations, created by the authors in their imaginative world.

What is delivered to us in store books and web sites easily downloaded by a simple click on the keyboard, used to be once upon a time hidden in hearts and perfectly mummified in minds, passed out from one generation to another through tales, legends, or songs and shaped according to the movements occurring through time.

The only legal way to travel out of the country without a passport, is while reading, by the help of a book, no matter how many papers it carries, periods of time are present with ink and papers to introduce each part of the globe to the other to erase the geographical boundaries and make the reader acquainted with the cultural differences.

In this research paper, one focuses on the witty side of Edgar Allan Poe in addition to his use of cryptography as a science in the literary field, "The Gold Bug" is taken as an example to be studied using the Analytical Approach, which helps the reader to better understand the choice of the setting, characters and the newly added elements in the short story. The two questions raised in this research paper are:

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- How did Edgar Allan Poe influence the development of the short story?
- What does *The Gold Bug* reveal about Edgar Allan Poe?

This work will be divided into two chapters, the first chapter will cover the theoretical part in which the American Romanticism and its characteristics will be presented, and how it changed the readers' lives and brought for them what was neglected by almost all the previous periods. In addition to that how this period helped a new form of literary genre to be born in it is full form ready to mesmerize the readers, with its different themes and components.

In the second chapter, one will provide the analysis of the different elements of the short story written by Edgar Allan Poe entitled "The Gold Bug". This Analytical approach will help the reader to know more aspects about this fictional story with its different components in general and about the author and his career behind the literary field in specific.



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## **1.1. Introduction**

In the wide berth of literature one can find all the periods which shaped the words through centuries, different themes were tackled in the printed forms found in book stores, from the old languages to the globally spoken ones. Each period had some characteristics which followed the daily life changes in all societies and tried to reflect what was found in the real world into fictional works with ink and papers; it was full of historical, artistic, comic, horror and detective stories.

From Puritanism and its spiritual ideas to enlightenment and its reasonable thinking, Romanticism came to combine the first and the second to better interpret and mirror the real world but in a totally different way. Romanticism was one of the periods which brought some changes to the world. In America, it was rather liberation from the previous periods' characteristics, it helped the Romantics to find themselves and give an identity to their works. In this chapter, a definition of the Romantic period in America and its characteristics, in addition to one of the arts which appeared at that time are provided.

## **1.2. The American Romantic Literature**

Through the timeline of the American arts, Music, Painting and Drama developed, as well as literature. America witnessed the sculpturing of its letters and the development of its writings through time, Starting from the oral literature which was perfectly hidden in the hearts of the Native Americans containing wisdom and respect; as it is found on a web site called the Prairie Edge that each time a story was told it breathed life into the culture, cultivated their verbal language, gave meaning to the tribe history, and also taught life lessons about things like love, leadership and honor (2011, Para 02) To the puritans whose first interest was to purify the church when their writings were

in form of reports and articles full of religious terms like ‘redemption’ and ‘God’s Election’, such as William Bradford’s *The History of Plymouth Plantation*.

All the previous movements paved the way to Romanticism to come and celebrate the Freedom of imagination, the beauty of nature, and the inner side of the human being (feelings), which according to an article by Carol Scheidenhelm *American Literary History: Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism* “emphasized on individual freedom, from social conventions or political restraints, on human imagination, and on nature in a typically idealized form” (2007, Para 01), it was not only a movement which brought changes to letters but also altered the nation’s problems and progress, in an article by Scheidenhelm it was asserted that:

the American Romanticism was an age of great westward expansion, of the increasing gravity of the slavery question, of an intensification of the spirit of embattled sectionalism in the south, and of a powerful impulse to reform in the north (2007, Para 03)

It represents what each reader feels, with ink and paper, it draws the individuals temperaments and his sake for freedom as it is written by Pakditawan Sirinya in his *Aspects of American Romanticism in Short Stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne* that: “Common themes of American Romanticism were thus faith in the innate goodness of the human spirit, freedom of the individual, the symbolic importance of nature”. It simply gave importance to neglected sides in the daily life, forgotten points in the previous movements as it is cited in *A Handbook to Literature* by Holman and Harmon that this period altered all the fields like philosophy, art, religion and politics, it changed them from the neoclassicism and formal orthodoxy of the other periods (1996). Even though it was given birth in almost all the European countries, in America it was a ‘Literary independence’ rather than a

movement which changed the shape of the American writings, as it is cited in a book entitled *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* edited by James Chandler:

The Romantic period was one of the most creative, intense and turbulent periods of English literature, an age marked by revolution, reaction and reform in politics, and by the invention of imaginative literature in its distinctively modern form (2009, p 01)

The readership of that period wanted something new, something to represent them, to take them away from the real world from the continuous changes in their country and ritual hideous look of their lives. The American Romanticism was this magical world which kept America as it is but transformed it to a fairy world of fictional characters in fictional stories.

If we look back in the depth of literature, we will find that each movement had its characteristics, and that all the arts at that period wore the same features which may identify them as belongings of that time. As Sartre stated in his book *what is Literature?* “There is no doubt that the arts of a period mutually influence each other and are conditioned by the same social factors” (1948, p 07). A painting, a song, a novel or a short story cannot be studied separately without taking into accounts the period in which it was painted, sung or written, which may help the researcher in clarifying the dim side of it.

### **1.3. The Basic Characteristics of Romanticism**

The American literary ground was acquainted with the changes occurring in its letters. In each period the authors molded the words to fit what they wanted to deliver, the characteristics helped in identifying the work and analyzing each point in it. During this period writers, poets, musicians and painters gave their works features in order to differentiate between

Romanticism and other period works. Within these works, the novel, the poem and the short story had some characteristics in common which are as follows quoted from an article by Scheidenhelm Carol (2007, Para 06):

1. Nature as refuge.
2. Highly Imaginative.
3. The common man as a hero.
4. Individualism.
5. Emotional intensity.

### **1.3.1. Nature**

Nature is the essential makeup of the entire world, the source of all spices and the origin of almost all what is found around us. In a book by Brian M. Stableford that the word 'nature' is: "a deceptively simple term derived from the past participle of a verb meaning 'to be born' which is also reflected in such English words as native, nation, and innate" (2006, p326)

Some of the previous American movements' writers, if not all included nature in their stories. The American Romantics were one of them; they gave nature a great importance as much as the characters, the setting and the plot. Nature for them was an equal portion of whole. It shaped the identity of the Americans throughout the history of the nation. As the first settlers of the "New Land" were flabbergasted by the geography of the land, it became for them a necessity to mention its beauty and equality to freedom in different written forms, as it is mentioned in a book by Viorica Patea entitled *The Raw and the Cooked: Methodologies of Nature in American Romanticism*:

Europeans were aliens in the new land yet they described their newfound American identity as an impulse of the land itself. The

ensuing civilization of the New World grew out of the very body of Nature itself. American society responded only to Nature, remained at one with it and embodied nature's laws organically (2014, p257).

The Romantics emphasized in their writings on nature, especially by the beginning of the story, when the author gives a wonderful description of a given place in the story, such as the beginning of "The Fall of the House of Usher" in which the author gave a beautiful description of the weather. Nature was not only a part of their lives, it was part of who they are, as Viorica Patea mentioned it: "Unspoiled nature provided the tangible embodiment of the founding myth of American origins" (2014, 257)

Since the land was boosting their pride of their origins and the rich history they have, it was a necessity for any Romantic writer to mention it in his work as one of the elements of the story. It witnessed changes through the continuity of the story just like the other elements (setting, time, characters).

### **1.3.2. Imagination**

Imagination had always been a shelter to where we escape from the daily life pressure and the social problems, it is this travel to a world of fantasy and wonder, it gives birth to a better sensation, to a limited hope to have a better life. This tiny world was a huge part of the Romantic stories whether short or long. The Romantic literature gave the reader the opportunity to escape even for a while from the real world and live phantasmagoric moments. As it is cited in an article by Josh Rahn that the most interesting points for Romanticism and its pioneers are consciousness and imagination; "the individual consciousness and especially the individual imagination are especially fascinating for the Romantics" (2011, Para 02): starting from the choice of the setting which is in some stories breathtaking, like the sea in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1837) and the choice of

characters such as in Frankenstein (1818) by Mary Shelley. As it is cited in an Academic Home Page (A Guide to the Study of Literature: A companion Text for core studies) that: imagination was elevated to a position as the supreme faculty of the mind. This contrasted distinctly with the traditional arguments for the supremacy of reason. The romantics tended to define and to present the imagination as our ultimate “shaping” or creative power (2009, Para 04)

Imagination is a daily life process, it can be defined also as an active fluent creation which reflects our real world but in better conditions, it also gives us the opportunity to do anything we want, it is the starting point of all arts and the ground from where we constitute reality with the combination of reason and feelings.

### **1.3.3. The Common Man as a Hero**

Throughout a character who is witty and nervous in some stories like in “The Gold Bug” and psychologically unstable and calm like in “The Tell Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat” by Edgar Allan Poe, The Romantic story gave the opportunity to the common man to be a hero; the main character of certain Romantic stories are closely related to reality just like Rip in the short story of Washington Irving “Rip Van Wrinkle” whose miserable life and the way he was treated by his wife could be found in the real world. So the real life man was transformed to a hero in the Romantic stories, in order to prove to the reader that he is part of the story.

One can say that the Romantic literature gave the opportunity to every neglected part in society and tried to make sense of it in order to mesmerize the reader throughout word painting, which survived for generations and reached nowadays.

### **1.3.4. Individualism**

Individualism was one of the main points in the American Romanticism, since America used to be a multicultural country, and adaptable to all the periods which brought changes to it in all the fields; in the nineteenth century, the idea of individualism became widespread and it was high time for the Americans to show their identity. In all arts, the Romantics welcomed this idea and added it to the previously cited characteristics, when the representation of the ‘self’ became an essential theme in their works, as it is mentioned in an article entitled *Romanticism* by Paul Brian: “Byron in literature and Beethoven in music are both examples of Romantic individualism taken to extremes” (1998, Para 03).

Individualism was not only a great point in literature but also in the other fields; since the representation of the self, became an important point, new words appeared like ‘self-realization’, ‘self-expression’, ‘self-reliance’ and many other words that represents the individual.

### **1.3.5. Emotions**

Emotions are one of the things we share in our life, in good or bad situations or memories we are tied to our feelings. Since it is part of our relations and the day to day situations, the works made at the Romantic period took emotions as an essential point in order to engage the reader to be part of the story. It had been an important point in the American Romanticism; whether sorrow, love, happiness or horror, the works of that period represented the individuals’ feelings and gave them an opportunity to be shown. In some literary works emotions overcome reason, when the feelings of love and passion vanish in vacuum and are replaced by hatred without having any awareness of the existence of reason, such as ‘The Black Cat’ when the narrator had an affection for his pets since his childhood, but as



soon as he grew up this feelings disappeared in his alcoholic habits and he murdered his beloved cat and then mentioned that everything of guilt and horror came back to him as reason returned to him too, can disappear with a sip of wine which makes everything of the deed vanish again; as it is mentioned in Michael Trayler's The Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe:

When reason returned with the morning, when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch, I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty...and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed. (2004,p63)

American Romanticism proved that it was high time for a purely American Literature containing the American Culture and thoughts. During the Romantic Period, a small genre of writings appeared, even though it existed before but in other forms like the song and the myth. It was time for the rise of the short story, as it was time for Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Herman Melville and Henry James to mesmerize their readers in each short story.

#### **1.4. The Short Story in America**

The short story is a tiny world to where you travel each time you take a book from the shelve and wonder for the choice of the title, the difficulty of words, the wide world of cultural differences, the beauty of imagination; it is this pleasure which vanishes quickly by living some strenuous words ringing inside your head, which pulls you to take another book of the same writer or of another.

Storytelling had been one of the oldest things human beings mastered, whether in forms of songs, fairytales or legends. The Greek, Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, French and British short tales paved the way to the new form of the

short story. The elements of this last developed and followed the waves of the wide sea of history. For this sake one may call the short story old and authentic as much as the previously cited forms whether they were long or short, until it reached the Romantic period. It was introduced in a book by Bendixen and Nagel: “the short story is an American invention, and arguably the most important literary genre to have emerged in the United States”. (2010, p03) At first the short story was published in some magazines as it is mentioned in a book by Nagel and Bendixen like the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century Magazine*, *Harper’s Magazine* and many others who gave the opportunity to such an art to be developed and spread all over America.

In an article by William Boyd he announced that the short story is a new form added to the field of literature and that: “Readers wanted short stories, and writers suddenly discovered they had a new literary form on their hands” (2006, Para03)

Since it was American, one may say that this literary form was moulded by the historical developments, and what was written long time ago has not the same elements or rather the same plot with what was written during the Romantic period i.e. the characters, the setting, the topic itself changed according to time and situations; for example, if we take the American short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving which was first published in 1820, its major theme was the conflicts between the country people and the city people. While “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins which was published seventy two years later in comparison to the first story, one can notice the little difference between them, even though they belong to the same period, and they were both given birth in the imaginative world. Charlotte Perkins delivers in her book her suffering from neurasthenia, and her growing fear from the yellow wallpaper in her room;

when writing was forbidden for her, she wrote one of the wonderful pieces of her short stories, in which she hinted at the women's fragility and weakness.

In a book by Nagel and Bendixen it was stated that Washington Irving defined the short story as follows:

The short story as Irving fashioned it was clearly a work of conscious literary artistry with vivid characters, a carefully delineated setting, and a mastery of stylistic nuance, and it was also a form ideally suited for the exploration of the meaning of democratic life in the newly formed United States (2010, p06)

Just to escape from the real life, the Romantics preferred to create a world of their own in which they portrayed what they lived. As it is mentioned in an article by Viorica Patea when she quoted Charles May's observation about the American Romantic short story: "the short story has from its beginning been a hybrid form combining both metaphoric mode of old romance and the *métonymie* (metonymy) mode of the new realism" (2012, Para 02)

The short story was a world where fact and fiction forms an amalgam and takes the reader to a dreamy world created by the author carrying a lot of meanings and hidden messages. It welcomes the reader to be an essential part of the story, and makes him believe in the events of this creative world, carrying real morals.

### **1.5. Humor in the American Short Story**

Writers use a lot of tools in order to make the fruit of their efforts beloved by people and bejewelled by some devices, humor can be considered as the last product which is delivered to us as readers when enjoying the short story we are reading by the aid of other devices like hyperbole, irony, sarcasm, exaggeration and many others.

Humor is not inherited, it cannot be found in our genetic imprints, it is a man-made temperament which leads to laughter after encountering a funny situation. As it is part of our daily life, writers started including funny situations in their plots, in order to drag the readers' boredom while reading towards the feeling of curiosity to know what will happen next to the characters through the flow of the story. As it is defined in an article written by Raj Kishor Singh : "Humor means the quality of being funny, it refers to an ability to perceive and express a sense of the clever or amusing thing" (2012, Para 01) Humorous stories contain ordinary characters having a normal life, what make us laugh after reading is their behavior, the funny decisions they take or the misunderstanding between them.

Humor as an element had been included in the short story, not only to make people laugh, but also to recognize what is found around them. Satire is an inseparable piece from humor, and since literature reflects the world's inner image, satire can wake people up to see the scene they are living in with a different lens and survive the changes in it, as William H. Coles stated: "To Aristotle and the Greeks, humor was synonymous to satire, and the use of humor indicated the solid understanding of the human condition at the time" (2009, Para 03).

What makes the humorous side of the story clear is for sure the use of humor's elements i.e., in order to lead the reader to the funny point in the story the author uses steps and hints which finally lead to a better understanding of the situation, the character or the timing. In an article by Coles he pointed the elements of humor which are invisible while reading but witnessed and felt while living the situation or when the message is clearly delivered (2014, Para 06) :

1. Surprise.
2. Misdirection.
3. Incongruous juxtaposition.
4. Exact timing of inciting and responding.
5. Ridicule (social non conformities).
6. A “cognitive shift” created by a discovery or solution to a puzzle or problem.

In an article by Reda Baranauskiené and Laura Pociuté it is asserted that:

Humour is a complex phenomenon which exists in every part of the world, nevertheless, travels from one language to another in difficulties. The main challenges in perceiving and translating humour are the problem of adequacy and sociocultural differences (2012, p51).

Since it is used in our daily life communication and makes the conversation more fluent and continuous while taking into accounts the cultural differences, the writers used it in their stories which are adapted from the day to day encountered situations and used this elements in the fictional world and characters they create, it is the deeper point in human connections.

### **1.6. Fiction in the American Short Story**

Fiction is a word derived from the Latin ‘fictiō’ which means the act of making, fashioning, or molding according to Encyclopedia Britannica (2016) and if we look deeper in side this genre of writings we can notice the presence of the three meanings. It was not only a step further towards another style of writing in the American Romantic literature, it was indeed a whole trip to another world of fantasy, mystery and wonders.

As much as humor is breath taking, as William Coles defines it: “Humor is really this monumentally complex subject that affects every human as regular and as necessary, as a heartbeat” (2009, Para 01), fiction had a great deal in the Romantic short story when it beleaguered almost all the short stories of that time and formed an amalgam with Gothicism, Humor, Cryptography, love and many other themes. It had and still has the same necessity in the master pieces as much as humor in the human life. Fictional characters, settings and plots play a gigantic role in reflecting the image of any given society conditions, as it is mentioned by John Duvall:

... from the Civil Rights Movement to the rise of Feminism; from the Cold War and its fear of communism and nuclear warfare to the Age of Terror and its different yet related fears of the other. American Fiction since 1945 has faithfully chronicled these anxieties. (2012, p.i)

As much as fiction stories are important and interesting for the reader they are so for the author, because he pours all what he feels and imagines in the melting pot (literature) of societies’ problems. In a book by Tim Gillespie he compared the passion of the author in using fiction to that of a child while creating his own imaginary world, he said: “Just as children construct alternate world of fantasy to fulfill their wishes and explore their fears so do writers work out their secret desire and anxieties in fictional form” (2010, Chap01).

The fictional short story is a man-made world and the verbal representation of his thoughts and feelings, it reflects all what is not obvious in his life and draws it with fictional characters made of his own carrying either the same characteristics with the real life ones or in some way much better and more distinctive.

## 1.7. Cryptography in the American Short Story

Hidden messages were drawn in the Roman temples and Egyptian Pyramids, buried in the depth of history, abandoned by all languages, left to be solved by time thousand years ago, as it is mentioned in an article by Gary Kessler that: “the first documented use of cryptography in writing dates back to circa 1900 B.C. when an Egyptian scribe used non-standard hieroglyphs in an inscription” (2010, p 63). It was neither witchcraft nor illusion but a science that could tell wonderful stories of kingdoms and rulers.

Cryptography or cryptology is a science by which a word or a set of words can be transformed to a code which is illegible, it is called “encryption” which can be solved by a key which can turn each letter to a meaning in order to have a legible form. According to a book by Kessler Gary there are three types of cryptographic schemes which can encrypt and decrypt a given text (2010, p 03):

1. Secret Key Cryptography (SKC): uses a single key for both encryption and decryption.
2. Public Key Cryptography (PKC): uses one key encryption and another for decryption.
3. Hash Function: uses a mathematical transformation to irreversibly “encrypt” information.

The use of cryptography in history was in order to hide some messages between some allies, as it is mentioned in a [Historpedia](#) that:

The increasing use of cryptography leads some major battle of the Second World War to an unpredictable and unexpected result. With the help of decrypts the Nazi’s message, allay win significant battle and finally win the Second World War. Cryptography is considered

as one of the potential unpredictable prospects of the major influence of the war (2012, Para 01).

It was not only a science used to solve political problems, but rather an enigma which brought some changes into life and society. As it is defined in a book by Kessler Gary:

Cryptography is the science of writing in secret code and is an ancient art; some experts argue that cryptography appeared spontaneously sometimes after writing was invented, with applications ranging from diplomatic missives to war time battle plan (2010, p02).

As it was part of political secrecy, cryptography had also a great part in literature and brought the delight of solving some secret messages and find mysterious treasures to the reader. It was something new to insert some codes and ciphers in literary works by the aid of its deciphering or as it is called in some articles “the key”. It drives the reader to be part of the code cracking operation and the treasure hunt.

In July 1841 Edgar Allan Poe published an article entitled “A few words on secret writing” in Graham’s Magazine in which he said: “Yet it may be roundly asserted that human ingenuity cannot concoct a cipher which human ingenuity cannot resolve” (Dooley, p29). Few years later “The Gold Bug” was first published in 1843 as it was considered the first story which used cryptography as a new element in the short story and opened the doors for other writers to start using this science as well such as Neal Stephenson in his Cryptonomicon (1999). John F, Dooley asserted that: “Cryptology has played a key role in many works of mystery, suspense, and science fiction....using cryptography and especially cryptanalysis, adds an extra flair to many stories” (2005, p290)

The use of cryptography in short stories, novels and films was in some degrees breaking the ritual look of the daily life of the Americans in the first



place and people abroad. It was that magical side which was used in the secret messages of the armies between the allies and then became one of the wonders and solved enigmas of the literary world when the hero of the story in a book finds the treasure by the end of the story like in “The Gold Bug” by Edgar Allan Poe, or is all the time pursued like in The Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson.

### **1.8. Conclusion**

American Romanticism is represented as the most fictional movement, it provided the reader with the appropriate tools to better imagine and live in this fictional world. It was not only a reflection of what was found in the societies and what irked people in the nineteenth century, it was a mingled recipe of love and hatred, of Gothicism and Humour, of freedom and possession. The American Romanticism was rather an escape to another world, full of new elements, away from the daily life routine, to the adventurous places made by the author. The American short story which was inherited from the old times combined new characteristics like cryptography to typically American ones such as humour and the common man as a hero. These aspects constitute the hallmark of Edgar Allan Poe and his short stories.

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## 2.1. Introduction

The flabbergasting aspects which were delivered through the novel in the nineteenth century Romanticism were also carried out through the short story. As it was still a new born art, it should be presented in the best way. The authors' passion for writing soon deviated to another form, which entertained and taught the reader to love and appreciate the short story as much as he appreciated the novel. It was not only some few papers and a story of an hour, it was much deeper than this, since it introduced a new science which had been used before in novels, and presented it in its wonderful states, neither politics nor love stories but treasure hunting. It gives the reader the impulse to fetch for it through the papers he holds in his hands. "The Gold Bug" is a short story which reveals a lot about American Romanticism as much as it does about Edgar Allan Poe.

In order to go in the deepest side of a short story, one should dig more into each element to better understand the meaning of each part of it. Characters are among the most important elements, which make it closer to reality and help the reader to appreciate the events more; in addition to humor as a daily shared temperament and cryptography as a science newly added in this genre. In this chapter, an analysis of both elements in "The Gold Bug" is provided.

## 2.2. The Author's Biography

Edgar Poe was born on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1809 in Boston Massachusetts, United States. He is an American Romantic writer, poet, editor and critic. He is the son of two actors, David Poe and Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins Poe (Ficher 01). In 1811, David Poe had earlier deserted his family, although the precise causes for his decamping have never been determined (Ficher 02)

He was adopted by the Allan family. He studied at the University of Virginia in 1826. As it is cited in Meyers's book that Military records in the National Archives state that on castle Island in Boston Harbor, Poe gave his age as twenty two while he was only seventeen that he was five feet, eight inches tall, with grey eyes, brown hair and a fair complexion (Meyer 32).

In 1827, he released his first poems collection *Tamerlane and other Poems* but it received no critical attention as it is cited in a book entitled *Lost in the Antebellum* in this collection his name was not mentioned he wrote instead by a Bostonian (Meyer 80). In 1836, Poe weds Virginia Clemm on 16<sup>th</sup> May. And in 1839, he begins contributing cryptographic puzzles and miscellaneous articles to *Alexander's Weekly Messenger* (Hayes xvii) in 1841, he accepts an editorial position with *Graham's*, to which he also contributes several tales like "The Colloquy of Monos and Una", "The Murder in the Rue Morgue" and "Never Bet the Devil your Head".

Edgar Allan Poe who was called the 'enigma' (Ficher 01) left this world on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1849 as he was found on the streets of Baltimore in a terrible condition and needed emergency (Geiling, Para01). Poe was never to leave Baltimore when he launched his career in the early nineteenth century, he was found outside the public house dead there on October 7<sup>th</sup> (Geiling, Para03) the causes of his death remained unclear and mysterious. He was one of the original writers in the literary world, not only in America but he also influenced European writers such as Jules Verne, Dostoevsky and Conan Doyle.

### **2.3. The Summary of "The Gold Bug"**

William Legrand, the narrator's friend, is the son of an ancient rich family who lost its fortunes. After his family loss, he decided to leave New Orleans where he used to live and took a residence in Sullivan's Island in South

Carolina. This small island is filled with myrtle shrubs and some buildings usually inhabited in summer. It was a beautiful place where the two friends met each other and the narrator admired his intelligence and politeness and where William Legrand took a small hut as a house for him and the family freed slave Jupiter who refuses abandoning him.

On a chilly day in October, the narrator decided to visit his beloved friend whom he had not seen for weeks, since he was a resident in a place near to the island. But when he reached the hut, he did not find his friend there and looked for the key since he knew its secret place and waited for William Legrand and Jupiter to come back to the hut. When they arrived after dark, Legrand described to his friend a new species of bug having a golden color that he found with three separated black spots on it forming a triangle. He had lent to Lieutenant G and the narrator will have to wait till the morning to see it, but soon Legrand gave him a sketch of it. When the narrator looked at the drawing, he said that it looks like a skull without the antennae when his friend's Newfoundland was playing with him. Legrand insisted that he drew the antennae very clearly but when he looked again at the paper, he grew red and then pale and went next to the fire place to make a deep examination of the paper as the narrator decided to leave.

After a month, the narrator received a letter in which Jupiter asked him to come to see his friend because he was acting in a peculiar way, and that he was nervous and sick besides that he kept writing things on a slate and one morning Legrand woke early and left the hut for the entire day. Jupiter suspected that Legrand's behavior had something to do with the gold bug since he knew that it bit Legrand. Jupiter wrapped the bug in a paper, but since that incident Legrand had been speaking of gold in his sleep. Jupiter gave the narrator a note from his friend which asked him to come immediately to his hut. The narrator worried about his friend and agreed to accompany Jupiter to the island.

When they reached the hut, Jupiter showed the narrator the scythe and three spades that Legrand asked Jupiter to buy. Legrand told his friend that he took back the bug from Lieutenant G and that he kept the bug for himself, and since Jupiter was right about the bug and that it was truly made of gold it can bring them a fortune. When Legrand asked Jupiter to bring him the insect he refused and tried to ignore his request, but he went to look for it by himself and asked the narrator to help him in finding it. The narrator himself also ignored him, thinking that his friend may be sick and insisted on seeing a doctor.

Legrand soon convinced them to accompany him on an expedition to the hills and agreed to see the doctor afterwards. The three men and the dog went out, equipped with a scythe, spades, lanterns and the bug and by nightfall they reached a dreary area of hills. They used the scythe to cut away the brambles, then they reached a tall tree. Upon Legrand's insisting, Jupiter agreed to climb the tree with the beetle, despite his fear of it. He followed Legrand's directions upward to the seventh limb, where he announced that the limb is weakened as it was mentioned in the paper he found. Jupiter climbed to the top of the tree and followed Legrand's instructions until he found the skull. Legrand asked him to drop the bug through the skull's left eye after the scythe cleared a space beneath the insect on the ground. Legrand marked the spot of the bug's landing and cleared a circle between the peg and another point fifty feet in the opposite direction from the tree so that they took the spades and began to dig.

Even though the narrator knew that his friend's temperament was bizarre and he was totally sure that there was no treasure beneath the skull, he started digging with them and followed his friend's marked points. But after digging a hole of five feet, Legrand recognized that Jupiter could not differentiate between his left and right hand when he was up in the tree. Legrand adjusted the digging marks and started digging over again. The narrator saw that he increased his speed and found a perfectly preserved chest of wood, inside which there was a

heap of gold and jewels. Jupiter soon changed his idea of the gold bug and moved the treasure with them back to Legrand's hut.

When they were back to the hut, Legrand recalled that he first found the scrap of parchment after the bug bit him. It was sticking up from the sand near the remnants of an old shipwreck. Jupiter used the scrap to capture the bug, and Legrand had accidentally kept the scrap when Lieutenant G took the insect with him for a study. So he connected the wreck with the parchment and the skull image, which he recognized as a pirate's emblem. It was not a paper but a parchment which is more durable than a paper. He recognized all of this when the narrator was in his hut the day he visited him and when he stood next to the fire place and started laughing at Legrand's drawing which resembled a skull without antennae. It was really the skull of a dead man.

He rinsed the parchment, reheated it and discovered a message written in codes, which he assumed to be in English. He counted the frequency of the symbols and used a substitution cipher which revealed the place of the treasure. Concluding that "Bishop's hostel"(Poe 25) referred to an old family named Bessop that gave their name to a rock called Bessop castle, Legrand asked an old lady who directed him to the rock, where he saw a ledge formation that resembled a seat. When he sat, he used a telescope to view forty one degrees and thirteen minutes above the horizon in the cited direction until he found the image of a skull. He decided that he had to find the tree at that point and drop an object straight down the skull's left eye to find fifty foot diameter away from the tree in which he would find the treasure and start digging.

He returned home and sent for his friend and insisted on the use of the bug to goad the narrator who believed his friend was mad and needed a doctor's help. By the end of the short story, the narrator asked about the skeletons above

the box, and Legrand speculated that Captain Kidd might have killed everyone who knew about the treasure in order to hide this secret.

#### **2.4. The Literary Analysis of “The Gold Bug”**

“The Gold Bug” is a short story of bewilderment, for it first implies that the main character had been bitten by a venomous spider, as it is mentioned in the beginning of the story “what ho! What ho! This fellow is dancing mad! He hath been bitten by the Tarantula” (Poe 01). This spider could have brought him hallucination about finding a treasure, but by the end of the story the reader discovers something totally different from what he believed had happened.

This short story was written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1843. It delivers a lot of new aspects unexpected from his readers, since he is well-known by his Gothic style of writing which is full of terrifying descriptions and events. This short story gives the reader the opportunity to dive more in the life of the author, in order to know more things about him as a person which can be reflected in his works. Humor is rarely found in Gothic American Literature, but Edgar Allan Poe used it as an attractive element in addition to cryptography as a very important science, in order to show the reader how an imaginative detective story can form an amalgam between different elements, whether rarely or newly used in literature.

The plot focuses on the scene of the story which is described in a realistic way as the main character took a hut as a residence for him after losing his fortune. The narrator introduces another character to the reader who is the family freed slave who did not want to leave William Legrand. Then, the story moves to the narrator’s sudden visit to his friend and as soon as they welcome him, Legrand told him about what he recently found which is a bug made of gold according to its weight and color.



In the second part of the story, suspense is used when the narrator talks about his friend's letter to ask him to come to see him for an important matter and that the golden bug he found may bring him back his fortune.

The characterization is represented in two round characters (the narrator and William Legrand) whom the short story focuses on and the events of the story are related to them. In the story a description is given to William Legrand as "well educated, with unusual powers of mind, but infected with misanthropy, and subject to perverse moods of alternate enthusiasm and melancholy" (Poe 02)

In addition to Jupiter who was introduced by the beginning of the story as the freed slave "In this excursions he was usually accompanied by an old negro, called Jupiter, who had been manumitted before the reverses of the family" (Poe 02) he was represented as a flat character who has a slight relation with the events in the first part of the story and soon turns to be a round character too, when he takes care of his master and then helps them to look for the treasure.

Edgar Allan Poe uses some literary devices to enrich his short story like the use of chemical diction such as "zaffre" (Poe 18) which is a crude oxide of cobalt and "Aqua regia" (Poe 18) which is a mixture of hydrochloric acid and nitric acid, it can dissolve gold. Allusions and references are used to enhance the meaning. "Huguenot" (Poe 01) is a name applied to the members of the Protestant reformed church of France. He also used "treasure" which alludes to buried gold and jewels, "skull" which refers to the dead's head and alludes to the sign of pirates flag, "Master" (Massa) refers to the authority of one character over the other, it is used by a servant or a slave towards his master. "Scaraboeu" is a small beetle which used to be sacred by the ancient Egyptians.

Alliteration is also one of the attractive devices used by Edgar Allan Poe whether in poems or prose. In this short story, it appears in "A Fine fire" (Poe 02), "Had built himself a small hut" (p02), "Sullivan's Island are seldom very

sever” (p02), “He had hunted” (p02), “ From the fort and very foolishly” (Poe 03), “still sterner solemnity to the scene” (Poe 08). It is the repetition of the same sound which confers a jerky musicality to the story and adds to its suspense.

Personification also had a part in this story, when the narrator described the tulip tree which they were looking for as he said: “...which I had then ever seen, in the beauty of its foliage and form, in the wide spread of its branches, and the general majesty of its appearance” (Poe 09). He gave the tree a wonderful description which resembles the appearance of a king or a queen.

Since slavery represented a great part of American society specially in the south of the country, Edgar Allan Poe added a character to his short story (Jupiter) who is the servant of the family. Even though he is a free man he still works for the family’s son (William Legrand) and still takes care of him and considers him as his beloved master. The author mentioned the dialect used by this class of society in order to make the story more realistic: “Dey aint no tin in him, Massa Will, I Keep a tellin on you” (p03) which means(There are no antennae in it, Master William, I keep on telling you this).

The setting of the short story is in Sullivan’s Island, Front Moultrie, near Charleston, South Carolina, beginning on a chilly day October 18<sup>th</sup>. Then the story continues after a month from this date at night when they started digging the earth in search for the treasure.

The short story is a combination of detective events and mystery; its tone is an amalgam of humor and horror. The themes tackled in “The Gold Bug” are of friendship between the narrator and the main character, trust between the two friends, slavery and authority. Even though, the slave was freed his master still orders him to do things he cannot do because of his age, and he cannot obey him because he does not have anyone to stay with in this old age.

The techniques of foreshadowing, telling and showing are clearly used in this short story. The author uses showing by the beginning of the story when he gives a description of the Island: “This Island is a very singular one. It consists of little else than the sea sand, and is about three miles long. Its breadth at no point exceeds a quarter of a mile” (p01) and then he mentioned the kind of grass which can be found there. All what is mentioned about Sullivan’s Island is realistic and very detailed, since Edgar Allan Poe lived there in Front Moultrie for one year according to an article entitled ‘Finding Poe’(Stinson, Para04)

He uses foreshadowing in order to tell the reader what is going to happen next before it happens in order to attract his attention for example:

He had found an unknown bivalve, forming a new genus, and, more than this, he had hunted down and secured, with Jupiter’s assistance, a scaraboeus which he believed to be totally new, but in respect to which he wished to have my opinion on the morrow (Poe 02)

The technique of telling is used to take the reader from a descriptive world where he only imagines the places described and how people look like according to the author’s words, to a more realistic world of conversations between characters, which may tell him a lot more than what he could find only in description. The author uses dialogues in order to better interpret the story, such as the conversation between the narrator and Jupiter:

“Well, Jup,” said I, “What is the matter now?” “How is your master?”

“Why, to speak de troof, massa, him not so berry well as mought be.”

“Not well! I am truly soory to hear it. What does he complain of?”

“Dar! Dat’s it! Him neber plain of notin- but him berry sick for all dat.”(Poe 04)

And the conversation between William Lagrand and Jupiter when he was up in the tree and Legrand guided him to find the skull:

“which way mus go now, Massa Will?” he asked

“Keep up the largest branch the one on this side” said Legrand

“How much fudder is got for go?”

“How high up are you” asked Legrand

“ebber so fur” replied the negro; “can see de sky fru de top ob de tree”(Poe 09)

The funny side of a story is always the hypnotizing part which attracts the reader and drives him to appreciate its events and characters and connect them to reality. Since humour is a shared temperament, the author added it as an element in this short story.

#### **2.4.1.The Analysis of Humor in “The Gold Bug”**

A definition was given to humor in an article by Anindya Sen entitled Humour analysis and Qualitative Research: “humor primarily consists of jokes (spoken or written words) and actions which elicit laughter or generate mirth (these actions can be described in words)” (Sen 01) and she added in the same article that according to Sigmund Freud, the pleasure obtained from a humorous event or utterance originated in the unconscious realm of our mind. The process of humor is a defense mechanism on the part of the ego and the superego to circumvent reality and protect themselves from the emotional consequences of adverse real life situations. It is called in psychology the relief theory as it is quoted in Sen’s article from Cooper’s book Elicidating the bonds of workplace humour: A rational process model in 2008 (Sen 01)

Humor is considered as one of the elements of the short story, and a huge part in the development of its scenes and the clarification of each situation happening over the flow of the story. This essential element is used in “The

Gold Bug” and is conspicuous in the beginning of the story, when the narrator is mocking at his friend’s drawing of the bug saying: “I fear you are no artist. I must wait until I see the beetle itself, if I am to form any idea of its personal appearance” (Poe 03). Then, it develops to be in the second part of the story, when the construction of humor is represented in the combination of funny conversations between the characters, such as the conversation between Legrand and Jupiter when he asked him to bring the bug for him and as he was afraid he told him to bring it by him-self using the colloquial accent of black Americans as he used to be a slave: “what! De bug, massa? I’d rudder not go fer trubble dat bug you mus git him for your own self”(Poe 07). The misunderstanding between them when they reach the tree and where the skull is supposed to be also creates a funny situation as Legrand asked Jupiter to throw the bug into the left eye of the skull but he could not recognize his left from his right hand which drives Legrand angry:

“Curse your stupidity! Do you know your right hand from your left?”

“Yes I nose dat nose all about dat tis my left hand what I chops de wood wid.”(Poe 09)

Americans were still having some slaves among their family members, even though some were freed but could not leave the family they were serving. Edgar Allan Poe took this into consideration and used this point in order to show the reader that slavery represented a great deal in the American life, and used their dialect as an attractive element, in addition to the little knowledge they have like the difference between the left and the right, in order to better deliver the story to the reader and make him feel that it is a real one. He has also recourse to another rather unusual element which is cryptography.

### 2.4.2. The Analysis of Cryptography in “The Gold Bug”

The use of cryptography is an essential aspect in political affairs and one of the secret elements that only military services were aware of. It soon took another deviation to be part of the literary works, and became a novelty for the reader to find some ciphers which he is not acquainted to in his daily life in a short story found in his books shelves. “The Gold Bug” is one of those literary works and the first short story which contains ciphers with their deciphering. As it is mentioned in an article by Kristin Leutwyler that Edgar Allan Poe had a keen interest in cryptography, he had placed a notice first in an article entitled “A Few Words on Secret Writing” in a magazine and then soon he published his short story “The Gold Bug” which contains some ciphers and their key. (Leutwyler, Para 01)

“The Gold Bug” provides a small or simple substitution cipher which contains some signs and each sign has its key to be deciphered. In the story it is mentioned that the main character found the paper which leads to the treasure and started deciphering it word by word and then looked for the meaning of the written sentences around him until he found the meaning of each reference:

A good glass in the bishop’s hostel in the devil’s seat twenty one degree and thirteen minutes northeast and by north main branch seventh limb east side shoot from the left eye of the dead’s head a bee line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out (Poe 24)

Each reference existed in the setting of the story and was mentioned by Legrand as soon as he deciphered the letter he found, such as: “bishop’s hostel in the devil’s seat”(Poe 25) which means the name of an old family ‘Bissop’ who used to live there and gave their name to a rock called Bessop’s castle. And “the dead’s head”(Poe 26) which means the skull of a dead man.

The use of cryptography in this short story gave the reader the opportunity to know more about this science, which has been used in several

stories after “The Gold Bug”. It was new by the publication of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story but soon became adopted by the readers who welcomed the newly added elements in the short story and started deciphering the codes by their own (Leutwyler, Para 01) 100 ciphers were sent to Edgar Allan Poe after the publication of this story and the article of “A Few Words on Secret Writings” as he asked his readers to send him any cipher they want and he will send it back to them deciphered (Leutwyler, Para 01).

Edgar Allan Poe uses cryptography in his short story not only as an element which is new for the short prose as well as for the reader, but also to represent himself through the story. He chose a character who resembles him in some points, like being educated, living in Sullivan’s Island and being able to decipher a cryptographic letter, in addition to his humorous side. “The Gold Bug” reveals a lot of new aspects about Edgar Allan Poe as a person. Throughout a fictional character, he introduces himself to his readers, which is completely different from his other short stories like “The Tell Tal Heart” which talks about a mad man. It was a clarification of the idea that all his writings are related only to Gothicism like “The Fall of the House of Usher”, Horror and Murders like “The Mask of the Red Death”, which is not true since there are some stories and poems which tackle different themes like love in Annabel Lee (1849) and death in To My Mother (1849).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The short story is an art which offers the reader the escape of an hour to a world of mystery. Edgar Allan Poe, who was well-known by his Gothic style of writing and the lack of humor in his detective stories, shows in this short story how it is a burst of feelings, of humor, of friends' love and respect, of fear, anxiety and enthusiasm, since he was before all a human being then a writer. Through cryptography and humor, he bejeweled this short story and introduced himself to his readers in a new style of writing rarely found in fictional stories, especially Gothic ones.



## General Conclusion

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As wide as the sky and deep as the ocean, as ancient as history and new as twilight literature is. Centuries passed, leaving wrinkles on its face which tells wonderful stories, whether oral about the natives' courage or written about the reasonable thinking and the Romantic world of fantasy. The characters, the setting and the plot always change but the aim of these stories is still the same. It teaches, it narrates hidden stories buried in the depth of history, it provides us with details about the imaginative world.

Whether short (Short Stories) or long (Novels), these arts could carry each country's setting, each person's life and each society's culture. Literature altered all the fields, since it is a reflection of the society, and the melting pot of its problems, even in the imaginative stories the authors chose a realistic element to shake the reader's attention and make him believe for an instant that he is in a real world while he is not.

The American Romanticism is one of the literary periods which helped the reader to travel through space, time and imagination. With the help of the authors' choice of words, setting and characters, it carries a lot about the American historical, as well as literary changes, which brought new elements to the American Short Story and helped in its development. Edgar Allan Poe was one of those authors who helped the reader to appreciate the short story as much as the novel, since it is centered over one plot and contains a limited number of characters. Throughout a short tale, the author brings all what is found in the real world and transforms it with wonderful descriptions to the fictional world we hold in our hands each time we enjoy a short story, we can find in it the humorous side of us, the friends love, the pursue for a better life, the loss of precious things or persons, the sciences we are eager to learn about and many other elements that are found around us.

## General Conclusion

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Edgar Allan Poe is one of those authors who helped in the development of the short story, throughout an analysis of “The Gold Bug”, one can conclude, that he succeeded with his authentic august taste in using cryptography as science used only in politics in deciphering letters between allies, in a fictional short story about hunting a treasure. With a vivid description of the setting, he simply took us from our warm beds to the Sullivan’s Islands woods, with an old freed slave, an intelligent master and a calm author to dig for a buried treasure under a skull hanged in a tulip tree.

This short story did not only take us to another world but also made us closer to the author’s life and his keenness to cryptography as a science and of his humorous side. One can also add that, the analysis of such precious literary works, drives us to search deep in the literary field, to go from general to specific, it teaches us how to be patient to learn more, and to never judge the book from its title. It simply encourages us to ask more questions, and broaden our literary horizon.

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