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THE ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION AND POETIC FEATURES OF THE IMAGE OF THE EAST IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN ROMANTICISM: A STUDY OF EDGAR ALLAN POE AND WASHINGTON IRVING

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Abstract. This article examines the poetic construction of the image of the East in nineteenth-century American Romantic literature through a comparative study of Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving. It aims to identify the aesthetic functions of Eastern settings, symbolic imagery, fantastic representation, historical memory, and narrative strategies. The primary corpus includes Poe's "Al Aaraaf," "Israfel," and "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade," alongside Irving's Tales of the Alhambra and A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada. Comparative-typological, poetic, intertextual, and narratological methods are employed. The analysis suggests that Poe largely constructs the East through metaphysical and ironic aesthetic models, while Irving represents it through historical-geographical and legendary spaces. The East is understood not as a fixed stereotype but as a literary construction performing diverse poetic functions.

Keywords: American Romanticism, image of the East, Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Orientalism, poetics, exoticism, symbolism, narratology.

INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century American Romanticism was a complex literary movement that helped shape national identity while reimagining representations of Europe, Asia, and Islamic civilization. In this literature, the "East" functions less as a fixed geographic region than as a textual domain associated with cultural otherness, ancient memory, supernatural experience, and heightened emotion. Studying its representation therefore requires more than listing exotic details: it involves explaining why those details appear and how they function within artistic systems [6, 7].

American writers of this period encountered ideas of the East through travel writing, historical sources, religious and mythological narratives, and European literary mediation. Thus, one text may approach Eastern culture with admiration, while another depicts it as mysterious, threatening, or comic. A parallel reading of Poe and Irving brings these differences into focus: Poe's images frequently serve explorations of consciousness, sound, and the cosmos, whereas Irving's tend to be rooted in place, history, and legend [1–5].

The object of the study is a selection of literary texts by Poe and Irving containing representations associated with the East. Its subject is the artistic-semantic function and poetic construction of those representations. The aim is to compare space, myth, symbolism, historical memory, narrative voice, and composition. The guiding question is why two Romantic authors of the same era transformed the East into such different literary languages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Edward Said's Orientalism argues that representations of the East emerge through relations among power, knowledge, and imagination [6]. His perspective discourages the treatment of literary images as neutral reflections of historical reality. Nevertheless, Said's model should not lead to the automatic assignment of the same ideological meaning to every Romantic image; each text's particular aesthetic function requires independent examination.

Dorsey Rodney Kleitz's dissertation on Orientalism in the American Romantic imagination situates Irving and Poe within the broader nineteenth-century American interest in the Middle East [7]. It provides a historical basis for comparing them. However, specific layers of poetic construction, especially frame narratives and lyrical-cosmic metaphor, warrant closer examination.

In Uzbek literary scholarship, D. Quronov's theoretical discussions of imagery, composition, artistic time, and space provide a framework for examining the unity of form and content [8]. His writings on literary interpretation and poetics further enrich the local theoretical context for comparative reading [9]. These works function as methodological sources rather than specialized historical studies of American Romanticism.

Homi Bhabha's insights into cultural representation and ambivalence help explain how fascination, distance, recognition, and stereotyping may operate simultaneously within the image of the East [10]. Accordingly, this article acknowledges the poetic power of such representations while also addressing the limitations of historical generalization and Romantic idealization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary materials are Poe's poems "Al Aaraaf" (1829) and "Israfel" (1831), his tale "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" (1845), and Irving's A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada (1829) and Tales of the Alhambra (1832) [1–5]. This corpus encompasses three modes of discourse about the East in the first half of the nineteenth century: metaphysical poetics, fantastic and ironic storytelling, and historically inflected legendary travel narrative.

Four complementary methods were applied. First, comparative typology was used to identify common and distinctive semantic features. Second, poetic analysis examined metaphors, epithets, allusions, rhythm, and descriptive details. Third, narratological analysis considered narrator position, embedded stories, and the imaginative reworking of historical materials. Fourth, intertextual analysis evaluated the literary functions of religious references and allusions to the Thousand and One Nights tradition. Theoretical criteria were informed by both Uzbek and international scholarship [6–10].

The observations were grouped into five interpretive categories: historical-cultural space, legendary-mystical imagery, Romantic exoticism, critical irony, and narrative framing. The scores from 0 to 3 in the diagram represent the author's illustrative qualitative coding of the selected works; they are not corpus-linguistic frequencies or statistically measured data. Explicitly stating this limitation helps clarify how the findings should be interpreted.

RESULTS

In Poe's poetics, Eastern names and religious-mythological references often intensify cosmic reflection, musicality, and extraordinary experience. The celestial landscape of "Al Aaraaf" is not a realistic representation of the geographic East but a transcendent stage for lyrical consciousness. In "Israfel," the angelic figure deepens questions of music, inspiration, and ideal art [1, 2]. For Poe,

then, the image of the East is less an ethnographic description than an aesthetic sign through which beauty beyond ordinary limits becomes imaginable.

In "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade," the Eastern storytelling tradition supplies a familiar narrative frame, which is then complicated by scientific discoveries, fantasy, and humor. Rather than simply repeating received "knowledge" about the East, the tale plays ironically with credibility, the distinction between fiction and fact, and the authority of the storyteller [3]. Idealization and parody are therefore not mutually exclusive in Poe: the same foreign cultural repertoire can generate markedly different artistic effects.

In Irving's Tales of the Alhambra, the palace, the landscapes of Granada, stories about the Moors, and material traces of the past construct a distinctively Romantic setting [4]. By alternating observation, memory, and local storytelling, Irving transforms a historical monument into a generator of narratives. His Eastern imagery is grounded in the legacy of Islamic Spain and should not be equated with the whole of Asia or with all Eastern cultures.

A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada dramatizes historical narration through opposing forces, vivid scenes, and the Romantic animation of the past [5]. This mode of representation also widens the distance between documentary history and literary stylization. The internal differences between Moors, Spaniards, and Arab-Islamic heritage should not be reduced to one generalized cultural figure.

Table 1. Comparative poetic features of the image of the East in Poe and Irving

Criterion	**Edgar Allan Poe**	**Washington Irving**
Dominant setting	Cosmic, symbolic, imaginary realm	Granada, Alhambra, historical landscape
Function of imagery	Metaphysical perception and aesthetic effect	Cultural memory and Romantic reconstruction
Poetic devices	Musicality, allusion, grotesque	Landscape, legend, description, historical stylization
Narrator position	Experimentation and irony	Traveler-observer and storyteller
Limitations	Turning the East into a mysterious abstraction	Romantic idealization of Eastern heritage

As Table 1 indicates, both authors use the East as a resource for Romantic aesthetics, but their points of emphasis differ. Poe primarily explores the inner dynamics of imagination, while Irving foregrounds the historical layers of narrative space. The contrast does not imply two authentic essences of the East; it reflects two different artistic strategies [1–5].

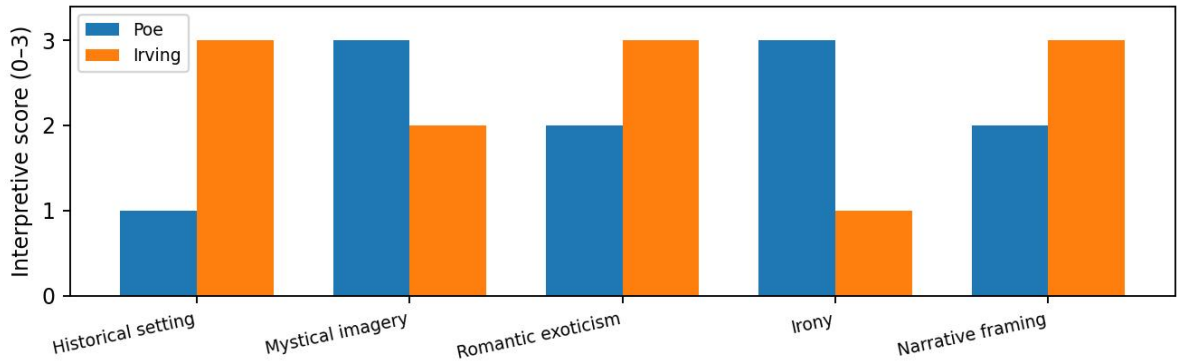


Figure 1. Illustrative qualitative coding of poetic features in the selected works (0 = not observed; 3 = prominent; not a statistical measurement).

The diagram suggests that historical setting and narrative framing are more prominent in Irving, whereas mystical imagery and ironic transformation are especially significant in Poe. Romantic exoticism remains visible in both authors, although it serves different ends: Poe connects it to unusual states of imagination; Irving uses it to render historical places legendary.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the "East" does not possess a single stable meaning in literary representation. In Poe, Oriental allusions may be detached from their original religious or cultural contexts and converted into Romantic ideals or ironic devices. In Irving, landscape and legend make historical heritage accessible, but the past is selectively filtered through nostalgia and aesthetic beauty. In both cases, aesthetic representation should not be confused with accurate historical-cultural description [6, 7].

Reading Poe and Irving through Said's theoretical perspective helps account for the roles of authorial viewpoint, audience expectations, and Western literary mediation [6]. Yet it would be reductive to interpret every exotic feature in a particular poem or tale as a direct political statement. Narrative form, genre, and ironic intention remain independent factors in literary interpretation [10].

The multilayered nature of the artistic image, historical poetics, and compositional unity emphasized in Uzbek literary theory helps clarify these differences [8, 9]. Treating Irving's descriptions of the Alhambra merely as "pictures of Eastern culture" would overlook their framed narrative structure. Likewise, identifying the origins of Poe's names and religious references is insufficient without examining their connections to sound, rhythm, fantasy, and thought.

An important conclusion from this comparison is that the East represented both an aesthetic possibility and an interpretive challenge for nineteenth-century American writers. This dual character makes the subject relevant to the history of national Romanticism, comparative literature, translation studies, and intercultural communication. Future research could extend the approach to other tales by Poe, Irving's travel writings, and additional American Romantic authors.

This study has limitations: five selected works cannot represent every manifestation of American Romanticism, and the numerical values in the diagram are explicitly interpretive rather than statistical. Furthermore, the "East" itself is a historically changing and transnational category. The conclusions should therefore be confined to the selected corpus rather than generalized to all writers.

CONCLUSION

First, the image of the East in nineteenth-century American Romanticism developed at the intersection of historical geography, cultural memory, and poetic imagination. Its meaning is not a ready-made formula repeated from text to text but an artistic resource reshaped by genre and composition.

Second, in Edgar Allan Poe's works, Oriental allusions are closely associated with metaphysical vision, musicality, fantasy, and irony. In Washington Irving's writing, Eastern heritage—particularly the historical landscape of Andalusia and Granada—is interpreted through legend, travel observation, and Romantic memory.

Third, the combined analysis of imagery, narrative viewpoint, intertextuality, and historical context offers a productive way to explain these differences. The aesthetic appeal of Eastern representations should not be equated with their historical accuracy. This approach also broadens opportunities for comparative interpretations of American Romanticism within Uzbek literary scholarship.

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