Reading Poe's "Ligeia": The Orient and "American" American Literature

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1. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), known as the father of mystery fiction and the author of mysteries such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), was also recognized for writing horror tales such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), "The Black Cat" (1843), and "Ligeia" (1838).

If we understand Poe as the creator of a subgenre, we may also look at systems of ethical interpretation, psychological critique, genre decomposition, and so forth, as a way of interpreting Poe's literary work through subgenre classification, for example, assessing the value of the significant contribution of his detective stories.

At the same time, Poe may be considered a modernist pioneer whose storytelling technique came to be recognized through his self-aware manipulation of narrative devices. Many phenomenological, structuralist, and poststructuralist critics acknowledge Poe's literary abilities and judge him as the finest author in nineteenth-century American literature—an author who understood the quality of narrative.

This paper, however, focuses on Poe as a magazine storywriter, in particular. He may also be considered a "magazinist" (i.e., someone who has a high regard for magazine literature), and indeed his work has features of popular fiction, as seen in *Tales of the Folio Club* (1832–36), which was conceived as his first collection of short stories. Importantly, Poe originally gained popular acclaim after his stories were featured in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Poe wrote "sensational tales"—an area in which this magazine was particularly strong—and while employing psychological sensationalism and elements of horror, he occasionally produced sensationalistic accounts with burlesque intentions. One example is his *Tales of the Folio Club*. (It should also be noted here that the original title of this collection was "Eleven Tales of the Arabesque.")

The aim of this paper is to analyze the short story "Ligeia" and to demonstrate Poe's "Orient" in relation to key concepts such as his "grotesque" and "arabesque." The paper also focuses on "American" American Literature reflected in the sensational "populism"[1] that is characteristic of Poe, as seen in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

2. An Interpretation of the “gothic” and “grotesque”

“Ligeia” was first published in the Baltimore *American Museum*, September 1838. According to Peithman, as one of the most common interpretations of this tale, “The entire story takes place just as the narrator tells it; a tale of the supernatural” (Peithman 45). It is true that “Ligeia” is a tale of the supernatural.

Therefore, I would like to analyze the elements of the supernatural in terms of the “gothic” and “grotesque” in this chapter. “Ligeia” is part of the short story collection *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* (1839), and it may be considered a tale about “death” and the “terror of death”—two of Poe’s favored themes. [2] For Poe, “fear” is “fear of death”; “fantasies” arise from the unknown, which lies in the grave; and “revenge” is tinged with shades of murder. The tales “Berenice” (1835) and “Morella” (1835) can be considered as predecessors to “Ligeia,” with “Berenice” ending in a grotesque climax. One feature common to these three stories is the death of a beautiful woman. The grotesque seen here is, to borrow John Ruskin’s words, “the art of a disturbed imagination” and “an essential part of the Gothic” (Thompson 105). That is, the grotesque includes gothic elements. Thus, “Ligeia” is, with its elements of the grotesque and the gothic, a horror tale of the death of a beautiful woman. In fact, the connection between the grotesque and the gothic may be found in “Ligeia,” as seen in the passage below.

> The ceiling, of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, valued, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device. [3]

Accordingly, Clark Griffith offers the following interpretation/observation of this same scene of the abbey in “Ligeia”:

> Within, were “melancholy and time-honored memories,” castellated turrets, ceilings “excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device.” Clearly enough, this reads much like a typical Poe setting. (Griffith 77)

Based on the words “semi-Gothic” and “semi-Druidical” mentioned in the passage above, it can be said that the following three themes, at least, relate to the gothic in “Ligeia.” The first is the death of a beautiful woman. The second is the narrator’s psychological instability. The third is the rebirth of the dead. Thus, it is possible to regard “Ligeia” as a horror tale of the rebirth of a dead, beautiful woman, revolving around an imagination that is born from the psychological instability of the narrator.

When the character Ligeia physically yields to death, the unstable narrator becomes “a bounden slave in the trammels of opium” (320). Such “narcotic illusions”—here, opium—refer to substances “commonly smoked or mixed with alcohol” and “usually indicating evil,

debauchery, or madness" (Thompson 166). These may be considered as illustrative of a gothic tale or, perhaps, as "semi-gothic" (321).

3. The understanding of "horror" and the "grotesque"

In February 1837, Poe and his family moved to New York, where he sought an editorial position. In that same year, the economic depression that struck the United States forced publishers and editors to tighten their belts. In early 1838, Poe, therefore, moved his family to Philadelphia, which was known as a significant publishing center, and where "Ligeia" was debuted in the September 1838 issue of *The American Museum*.

In the 1830s, Poe had to strive to maintain his very livelihood. And he lived in the American situation, as follows.

> Travel narratives, fictional tales, and a range of other writings gained wide readership in the United States, and they produced an especially keen interest among the small but growing members of America's literary culture in the 1830s and 1840—precisely the time Poe was writing. (Egan 100)

American readers in that period tended to possess an intimate familiarity with the Orient, which was a "virtually inexhaustible reservoir from which nineteenth-century writers in Europe and America drew their knowledge of the Near East" (Finkelstein 289).

With this background in mind, let us return to "Ligeia." When the character Ligeia dies, the narrator, without pause, finds a second wife. This new wife is "the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine" (321). Rowena, the blond, blue-eyed second wife, stands in contrast to the dark-haired, dark-eyed Ligeia. Through this opposition, Ligeia can be read as being strongly imprinted with the Orient. Additionally, there is the presence that is said to have conducted the wedding ceremony of Ligeia and the narrator, as described below:

> And, indeed, if ever that spirit which is entitled Romance—if ever she, the wan and the misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt, presided, as they tell, over marriages illomened, then most surely she presided over mine. (311)

The mention of the possibility that this presence was "the Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt," suggests "orientalism." Orientalism is a characteristic not only of this brief description of the wedding but also of the long passage below.

> For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller

> than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals—in moments of intense excitement—that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty—in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps—the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth—the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. (312–13)

The words “tribe [of the valley] of Nourjahad” recall “The History of Nourjahad” (1767), by Frances Sheridan (pseudonym, Sidney Biddulph), a tale whose setting is the Orient. Further, the name Houri may refer to a maiden who was at the disposal of men in Islamic paradise.

Strangely, Ligeia, who is thus linked with the Orient, appears to have no relation to the grotesque or the gothic, and thus there would seem to be no need to read this story from such a perspective.

The word “grotesque” originated from the Italian word *grotesca* and referred to the decorative figures and wall paintings discovered in grotto caves in the second half of the fifteenth century. It was characteristic of this form of artistic expression that human and animal parts were combined and fused with objects such as candelabras and columns. This creative voicing was associated with an “unrestrained imagination” that did not have a close connection to reality, and with a realm of chaos in which human, animal, botanic, and material worlds all bled into each other and mixed their territories.

Further, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), the etymology of grotesque is as follows:

> the etymological sense of *gtottesca* would be “painting appropriate to grottos.” The special sense is commonly explained by the statement that grotte, “grottoes,” was the popular name in Rome for the chambers of ancient buildings which had been revealed by excavations, and which contained those mural paintings that were the typical examples of “grotesque.”

As suggested above, the word grotesque, as a name for decorative figures and wall paintings, indicates an “uninhibited imagination.”

Considered in this light, the gothic does not appear to contain elements of horror or fear. No clear association between grotesque and gothic appears in the definitional elements of grotesque.

The entry for grotesque in the *OED* provides the following two usage examples:

> 1. a. A kind of decorative painting or sculpture, consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers.

1823 Grotesque, the light, gay, and beautiful style of ornament, practiced by the ancient Romans in the decoration of their palaces, baths, villas, etc.

b. A work of art in this style. Chiefly pl., figures or designs in grotesque; in popular language, figures, or designs characterized by comic distortion or exaggeration. The Italian form grottesco (pl. grotteschi) is sometimes used.

1856 A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way.

According to example 1.a., an example of grotesque being used in 1823 is a "beautiful style of ornament." Example 1.b., from 1856, indicates that grotesque is not necessarily linked to fear or horror; therefore, semantically, it is possible to interpret the term as not only including fear or horror but also figures or designs by exaggeration, which leads to a tale of the supernatural.

4. The appearance of the arabesque

Turning again to the tale of "Ligeia," until the death of the character Ligeia, no mention is made of the grotesque or the gothic. As she nears death, however, she summons the narrator and orders him to read her a poem she has written. Then, after he begins reading the poem, expressions related to the grotesque and the gothic fear appear for the first time within the poem, as seen below.

And much of Madness and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot. (319)

After the narrator has finished reading the poem, Ligeia dies, and then the tale shifts to the interior of the residence into which the narrator has moved.

Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets of tufted gold! I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. (320)

Grotesque aspects emerge here through the combination of orientalist (Egypt) and gothic ("madness") elements. The word "bedlam" suggests a sense of "turmoil, agitated disturbance, confusion verging on madness" (Thompson 166), and, etymologically, the term is "derived

from the short appellation for Bethlehem Royal Hospital (pronounced Bed'lam), the oldest establishment for the care and confinement of the mentally ill in England, converted from a 13th-century priory about 1400" (Thompson 2004, 320). Finally, to emphasize this point, as previously noted, the description of being "a bounden slave in the trammels of opium" (320) can be interpreted as a feature of "gothic stories, usually indicating evil, debauchery, or madness," in the words of G. R. Thompson.

It is then later revealed that this interior setting is in fact the inside of the room of Rowena, the second wife.

> Some few ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure, were in various stations about—and there was the couch, too—the bridal couch—of an Indian model, and low, and sculptured of solid ebony, with a pall-like canopy above. In each of the angles of the chamber stood on end a gigantic sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor, with their aged lids full of immemorial sculpture. But in the draping of the apartment lay, alas! The chief phantasy of all. The lofty walls, gigantic in height—even unproportionably so—were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry—tapestry of a material which was found alike as a carpet on the floor, as a covering for the ottomans and the ebony bed as a canopy for the bed, and as the gorgeous volutes of the curtains which partially shaded the window. The material was the richest cloth of gold. It was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. (321–22)

Lady Rowena's room further affirms the aspect of "orientalism": the tapestry that covers the entire room appears to be emphasized. Yet, this tapestry is not grotesque but arabesque.

On inspection, the arabesque figures in this room "partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view" (168). In other words, these figures change in appearance when viewed from different angles. They are "monstrosities" (322) at the moment one enters the room, and visitors experience "an endless succession of the ghastly forms" (322).

Considered thus, the grotesque that precedes Ligeia's death transforms into the arabesque after her death, that is, following the appearance of Lady Rowena. The arabesque is then linked with the gothic, assuming the role of the grotesque.

Arthur Clayborough's perspective may be of use here.

> It must be remarked here that in Romantic usage, largely through its relationship with the "Gothic"—in the widest sense of that term—the word grotesque develops a nuance already latent in Johnson's definition: "Distorted of figure; unnatural; wildly formed." (14)

As Clayborough indicates, “Ligeia” was featured in *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*. The foreword to this collection begins with the statement “The Epithets ‘Grotesque’ and ‘Arabesque’ will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published.” It is possible in Clayborough’s interpretation to see connections between the meanings of “distorted of figure” and grotesque and, further, between “unnatural” or supernatural and grotesque.

We would like to consider the elements between grotesque and arabesque. The *OED* gives the following definitions of the word “arabesque”:

A. Adj.

1. Arabian, Arabic

1842 Encycl. Brit. The inglorious obscurity in which the Arabesque doctors have in general slumbered.

2. Esp. Arabian or Moorish in ornamental design; carved or painted in arabesque.

1849 A sort of arabesque pattern with festoons of fruit and flowers.

3. Fig. Strangely mixed, fantastic.

1848 Dickens Dombey Surrounded by this arabesque work of his musing fancy.

The two definitions are different, but to expand the *OED* explanation somewhat, it may be said that “Arabian or Moorish in … design” refers to figures developed from stylized leaves, flowers, birds, beasts, and people found in Islamic art—that is, Arabian appearance and designs, seen also in crafts and buildings, which were created in the Islamic realm and that gradually spread to the rest of the world. From this perspective, it can be understood that the arabesque is expressed through the connection with orientalism, and that this representation of the arabesque in turn stands for the grotesque. As already noted, representations of the arabesque can be found in the interior of Lady Rowena’s room after Ligeia’s death. Moreover, Ligeia herself, who comes back to life in this room, signifies orientalism with her dark hair and dark eyes.

In a sense, the strange union of human and nonhuman elements itself has been recognized as characteristic of the grotesque and linked with images of the underworld, of demons, of perversity, of brutality, and so forth. In the short story “Ligeia,” these images of the grotesque are connected with images of the arabesque, as can be illustrated in the word “and” that appears between “the Grotesque” and “the Arabesque” in the title of Poe’s collection *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*.

The Cambridge History of American Literature, volume 2, edited by Spiller, should also be mentioned here.

> The title [*Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*] may have been suggested by Scott’s famous essay, “On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,” but Scott had used both “arabesque” and “grotesque” interchangeably to suggest the bizarre quality of

> Hoffmann's imagination. (Spiller, 329–30)

Spiller considers the words grotesque and arabesque as expressing almost the same meaning. Thompson, however, suggests that Poe may have chosen the title *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque* due to the influence of Sir Walter Scott's essay "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman," which appeared in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (July 1827).

> In Germany, a Romantic aesthetic of the multilayered arabesque narrative developed toward the end of the eighteenth century and flourished during the first third of the nineteenth century. Under the particular influence Friedrich von Schlegel, the elaborate and intricate structures of arabesque tales became meshed with a pervasive theory of irony. Humor, satire, and parody were seen as the tools of Romantic irony, which is neither just parodic nor serious but both simultaneously, as in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and the plays of Shakespeare. Thus Poe's title, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, comes to have particularly suggestive and resonant implications for the mixture of serious gothic dread, exotic settings and themes, unnatural grotesques, comic distortions, and humor, satire, parody, and irony. (2004, 80)

The outward appearance of the grotesque has the character of a strange combination of "exotic settings" or "unnatural" elements. With "[...] the Grotesque and the Arabesque" Poe juxtaposes the word grotesque with the word arabesque, connecting them with "and," and thereby causes this strangeness to adopt an "Arabian" type of supernatural, emphasizing the "exotic setting" within the room of the abbey.

5. The arabesque and Islam

Let us return again to the account of Lady Rowena's room in the short story "Ligeia."

> But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view. By a contrivance now common, and indeed traceable to a remote period of antiquity, they were made changeable in aspect. To one entering the room, they bore the appearance gradually departed; and step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the guilty slumbers of the monk. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole. (322)

This passage focuses on the transformation of the arabesque figures by drawing attention to their "animation." At the moment that one enters the room, the figures appear to be

stationary, "monstrous" designs, but as one moves farther into the room, they change into "moving ghosts." Jacob Berman asserts that

> moving from static "monstrous" design pattern into mobile "ghastly forms," the change in the arabesque in "Ligeia" has textual and metatextual significance. It both foreshadows the Lady Ligeia's ghostly reincarnation and schematizes the goal of the tale of sensation. For the dark and displaced Ligeia of the story's title, the first wife whom the narrator struggles both to memorialize and to eradicate, eventually returns through the vehicle of the arabesque and usurps the place of the fair-skinned Rowena. (121)

It may be sure that this transformation presents a framework in which the reader learns at the last stage that the dark woman, Ligeia, returns to life, as though driven into the room that is supposedly newly occupied by Rowena. With the arabesque room as the death place, this closed room is the embodiment of moving death, and it can be thought of Po's vision of "animation."

It is worth noting that the marital relationship collapsed with the death of Ligeia as this arabesque triggered an Islamic interpretation. In the Islamic world, each member of a married couple lives in accordance with his or her own nature, which allows them to flower and to form a basic unit with other partners. While maintaining the relationship of a married couple, each partner thus maintains his or her subjectivity, and the personality and different qualities of each person are apparent. Through accepting these differences, the spouses create a complementary relationship based on cooperation with each other. This process then precisely resembles the arabesque pattern to others. Each unit of an arabesque pattern exists as one unit and constitutes the whole pattern. The arabesque pattern shows boldly the existence of this aspect of the Islamic realm and of the world generally. Therefore, we must verify the meaning of this in "Ligeia," where the arabesque pattern collapses.

What should be highlighted here is the transformation of the arabesque figures. The change of something static into something moving is associated with Ligeia's rebirth. One of the features that should be considered is the original meaning of "arabesque." As seen in the *OED*, arabesque was originally an adjective meaning "of Arabia." It is, thus, possible that Poe's arabesque figures may be considered simply as a method of decorating a space, but we should not overlook the meanings of "Arabesque figures" as follows.

> Arabesque figures, in the strict sense of the word, must be abstract, as Islamic law bans representational images. However, Poe here indicates they are representational — "ghostly forms" — meaning that the word is used only for its associational sense, or that Poe is as ignorant of one Semitic religion as he is of the other. (Peithman 54)

According to Poe's "secular" interpretation of its meaning and his ignorance or lack of knowledge on a Semitic religion, the word arabesque carries multiple meanings and images, "giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole" (322). If the arabesque "tapestry art in its entirety" is formed of "ceaselessly moving ghouls," there is the possibility not only of creating an image in the arabesque but also of conflicting even with the "aniconism" (ban on depicting sentient beings) in Islam.

As may be understood from the narrator's view of Ligeia—"For long hours detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry" (317)—that her passionate feelings of love and attachment are such that they approach "idol worship."

Additionally, there also lurks here the possibility of the idolatry forbidden in Islam: "the misty-winged Ashtophet of idolatrous Egypt," that is, in the appearance of the Egyptian goddess Ashtophet (a Phoenician goddess of fertility, sexuality, and abundance), who was worshiped as an idol.

It is impossible for a narrator who is the other partner to be privileged, and through the arabesque pattern "animation," its privileged existence is visualized or idolized in terms of Islam. It is true that, as Brett Zimmerman suggests, "Ligeia" deals with "metempsychosis, the passage of a soul from one body to another" (45), but the passage may also suggest a transformation from an Oriental thing to a Western thing, invoking the supernatural.

6. Poe's "American" American Literature

We would like to remember Ligeia's existence as Lady Rowena opposition axis. Ligeia's eyes are "far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race" (313) and "fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad" (313). Based on these descriptions, Malini Schueller insists,

> Ligeia's vast knowledge, combined with her Near Eastern looks, associates her with the culture and learning of the region. Egyptology, as we know, revealed the existence of a civilization and culture that predated the West. Epistemological control over this culture (which was not necessary coincident with possession of lands and peoples, although indirect possession in terms of control of trade cannot be ruled out) soon began to be seen as an index of the power of a nation knowledge of the Orient meant not simply discovering what was there but knowing it in its totality better than natives and mastering it. (Schueller 114)

From not Islam representations, it may be said that it is the study above that proved "the Orient" from the viewpoint of the protagonist of Ligeia. As for the perspective of Poe, it deserves attention not to be the direct occupation or colonization of "the Orient."

His viewpoint may lead to "a national knowledge of the Orient."

As I said earlier, the use of the word arabesque in "Ligeia" suggests that Poe had an inclination toward "Arabia" and the "Arab." One reason for this, given the historical and cultural context of that period in the United States, may be the influence of oriental romanticism. We would like to look at the next description of this tale.

> From out the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting, depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metal, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with a serpent vitality, a continual succession of parti-colored fired. (167-8)

In this sense, May's instatement will be effective as follows:

> [T]he ceiling has semigothic, semi-Druidical devices and a censer of a Saracenic pattern, and the walls are hung with tapestries with arabesque patterns that are changeable in aspect when viewed from different points of view and that have on a phantasmagoric effect that is pure pattern, with no correspondent reality in the external world and with no external world to interfere with it, world of romance.
>
> (May 63)

"Saracenic in pattern" (167) refers to Syrian–Arabian Style as follows:

> "Saracen" was a medieval term for Arab, and by extension, Moslems in general. Strictly speaking, the terms applied only to the people of northwestern Arabia, who held Sicily and parts of southern Italy in the ninth to eleventh centuries. Palermo and Monreale have some excellent examples of the fused architectural styles of the Saracens, Byzantines, and Normans. (Peithman 54)

This term of "Saracen" or "Saracenic" indicates the conscience of the Orient related to the "world of romance." This "world of romance" relates to Poe's fascination with the Orient and "reflects the widespread interest of the period, spurred on by the deciphering of the Rosetta Stone by Jean Francois Champollion (1730–1832)" (Peithman 54). In 1799, the Rosetta Stone was discovered in Egypt. This is when Napoleon Bonaparte had travelled to Egypt with the intention of gathering information for Egypt's colonization. One of the accomplishments of Napoleon's expedition of collecting information is the Rosetta Stone, which is linked to the opportunity of colonialism or imperialism to the Orient. The Rosetta Stone was deciphered by Champollion in 1822. Moreover, in parallel with these situations, in fact, for example, the US General Consulate was established in Jerusalem in 1844, and as a result, there was a sudden increase in Christian pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem from the United States, which

led to a widespread Jerusalem craze called "Holy Land Mania" in the United States.

Considered in this light, it can be said that Poe's arabesque perspective reflects such a romantic nationalism. In his essay *The Philosophy of Furniture*, in which he discusses the people of various countries throughout the world, Poe comments that "the Yankees alone are preposterous" (496) when deciding on interior decoration. A kind of ethnic nationalism can perhaps be seen here, which is supported by his words in the following passage:

> There could be nothing more directly offensive to the eye of an artist than the interior of what is termed in the United States—that is to say, in Appallachia—a well-furnished apartment. (497)

These words lavish praise on America in "interior design." In "Ligeia," the place where the dark-eyed Ligeia is brought back to life is a room that has become "worldly" and "secularized," where arabesque figures have become animate—here, Ligeia's rebirth can be interpreted as America's rebirth. If the arabesque is taken as the shaping of American domestic interiors, we may present the national space of "domestic America."[4] Here, the arabesque figures are used as interior decoration, which carry oriental elements, which may indicate Poe's national consciousness regarding America at the time. "Appalachia (variously spelled) and Allegania were proposed as new national names for the United States and were much discussed in 1845 when Poe revised this article" (503).

In this vein, in the era of nineteenth-century romanticism, the Orient may be considered not only to have functioned in the fields of fantasy and nostalgia but also to have possessed the ability to build a secular nationality inside a room in a certain literary work—that is, inside the sphere of "domestic America."

Poe's use of the arabesque may require an understanding based not on a society with religious principles but on the values of a secular nation and on separation of church and state. An independent interpretation is required: as seen in America's Jerusalem craze, an orientalism that included the Arab and the arabesque was necessary for the formation of the American nationality.

In this sense, it may be said that, as more Americans visited the Orient, by introducing the arabesque—that is, "populist" elements of the Arab world—into domestic America as the "grotesque" and by tailoring this to the "popular masses," or to what is "American" in the form of the interior of a room familiar to American citizens, Poe, in a sense, was actively seeking to write a work of "American" American literature based on what was Oriental. Poe uses "Ligeia"

> to satirize the American literary scene by calling attention to the drawbacks of a specific form of literary nationalism that trades specifically of fears of the "foreign."
> (Egan 103)

Making effective use of the multiple meanings and images of the arabesque, Poe faces "the Orient." Therefore, Jim Egan has the following to say:

> Poe uses a unanimously praised collection of unambiguously "foreign" material and challenges the very goal of a distinctly *American* American Literature. (103)

Notes

[1] About "populism," there will be a place abreast of Poe's "showmanship."

> The life that Poe infused into his poems, stories, and critical essays is the only life that has color and romance and logic and reality … The showmanship that went into his work—whether superb artistic discipline or, as sometimes happened, mere surface effects intended to attract the attention of an audience engrossed with "elocutionists, travelers from the Holy Land and the freaks in Barnum's Museum"—this showmanship is the stamp of his personality, his gait and voice and signature. (Fagin 235)

[2] As the sources of "Ligeia," Stephen Peitman points out as follows:

> Sources include Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe (1820); specifically, the story of Rebecca and Rowena. In Scott's novel, Rebecca is wrongly accused of witchcraft. After her death, Ivanhoe marries Rowena, and we assume, broods over his first wife's death, a possibility that must also have occurred with Poe.
>
> Another source is "A Madman's Manuscript," in Chapter 11 of *The Pickwick Papers*, which Poe reprinted in the *Southern Literacy Messenger* in November 1836. The story contains several familiar elements, including a beautiful home, the hero's mental instability, his lack of love for his wife, his contempt for the wife's family for pushing her into a mercenary marriage, and his inability to remember dates and incidents. "I don't remember forms or faces now, but I know the girl was beautiful," Dickens' tale begins. "I know she was; for in the bright moonlight nights, when I start up from my sleep, and all is quiet about me, I see, standing still and motionless in one corner of this cell, a slight and wasted figure, with long black hair, which, streaming down her back, stirs with no earthly wind, and eyes that fix their gaze on me, and never wink or close." The resemblance to "Ligeia" is unmistakable. (Peithman 45)

[3] E. A. Poe, *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. T. O. Mabbott Vol. II, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1978), 321. Hereafter citations to this edition will be given parenthetically in the text for both "Ligeia" and "Philosophy of Furniture."

[4] Around "arabesque" and "Americana," the following words of Hoffman become the motive.

> It is my [Hoffman's] hope, in writing sometimes personally about one reader's relationship to Poe's work, to suggest how Poe's artifices—the images and patterns in his Arabesques, the strange diction of his poems and tales—are intensifications of the realities they seem to avoid." (xiii)

And these "realities" are an opportunity to investigate "Americana," or what "America" is, in "Ligeia."

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