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American Orientalism: A Critical Reading through Edgar Allan Poe

Loiy Hamidi Qutaish Alfawa'ra¹
Jameel Ahmed Alghaberi^{*2}

¹Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202002, INDIA

²Department of English, Thamar University, Dhamar, YEMEN

Abstract

To date, The Arabian Nights still create frames of reference outside its fictive core. The article critically examined the adaptations and appropriation of the classic Arabian Nights by Edgar Allan Poe and how he invested his interest in the Orient to advance his career as a writer. More specifically, the aim was to study the links between European Orientalism and the new version of the Orient constructed in the United States. Various modes of reading and approaches were used to critically interpret the primary texts. Orientalism and postcolonial theories provided a theoretical framework for the study, and the deconstructive approach was applied in certain contexts to deconstruct and dismantle the stereotyping and mythologizing of the Orient. The article contributed to the growing scholarship on American oriental discourse by offering a counter perspective. Poe's poems and short stories all perpetuate negative oriental representations. His obsession with the Orient is not reflected as aesthetic appreciation but it is rather appropriation that distorts and never restores. Poe's oriental discourse is only examined lately by Arab critics of American literature and more specifically it surfaced through translations of his works into Arabic. Through stereotypical duplication in the world of realism, a fake Orient has become there in the world of reality.

Keywords: Arabian Nights, imagined other, orientalism, stereotyping.

* Corresponding author, email: abujamaljameel@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe's fiction exhibits various oriental images and his writing stands as evidence of the 19th century American obsession with the Orient (Simour, 2013). Poe was influenced by the British version of Orientalism and his study of the classics furthered his knowledge of the Orient. He had never visited or experienced the Orient himself; therefore, he completely relied on European books of Orientalism and travel narratives to formulate his own idea of the East (Fleming, 2000). The European Orientalists provided 19th century American authors with inauthentic and highly-biased materials about the Orient. As it did in Europe, the Orient provided the United States with a convenient and already-formulated antagonistic way to define itself immediately after the independence of the United States (Vogeley, 1995). The identity that an emerging country strove to formulate relied heavily on a counter-definition of the Orient.

Edgar Allan Poe was among the first American authors to appropriate oriental aesthetics and introduce the Orient to American readers rather in a European guise (Montgomery, 2010). The translations and appropriations of *The Arabian Nights*, as they did in Europe, generated new versions that did not necessarily identify with the original one. Galland's translation, however, served as a springboard for further literary and cinematic creations and appropriations. In any case, the different versions of the Arabian tales attest to the strong influence of such stories on popular folk narratives in Europe and the United States. More importantly, the Orient in 19th century America was a literary source for further appropriations and adaptations, providing an alternative aesthetic space. The imagined 'other', the charm, and the glamour of the Orient captivated poets and storytellers apart from the readership and commercial payoff (Cassidy, 2001).

The aim of this study is to study the links between European Orientalism and the new version of the Orient constructed in the United States. The argument is that American Orientalism scholars have been politicized and are largely ideologically oriented and driven. For neo-Orientalists of the United States, knowledge production is a vital element of dominating the Middle East. Therefore, they try hard to control the Middle East and Islamic studies and any related associations that produce knowledge about the Orient. It is also realized that the United States has begun incorporating distorted notions of 'the Orient' into its social and political formations long before the arrival of Arab immigrants. Orientalist perceptions and images were widespread throughout the United States due to the European influence on 19th century American writers, and Edgar Allan Poe is just one example (Dallh, 2007). The Orient portrayal was embedded in and became part of many levels of cultural expression. It was delivered not only through literature but also through a variety of channels.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With regard to the construction of the 'Orient' in the American imaginary, Kleitz (1988) highlighted that the Orient in the 19th century was an object of fascination for American writers and artists altogether. She examined the influence of the Orient on the imagination and work of some American authors, including Edgar Allan Poe. Her analysis revealed that many American authors of the 19th century exhibited an

enormous interest in the Orient and their interest originated either from a religious purpose or an aesthetic appreciation. Some traveled to what is known today as the Middle East for pilgrimage purposes, and many others made their expeditions across the Nile River in Egypt for exploration of a civilization. However, Kleitz (1988) argued that the Orient by the 19th century was no longer an imaginary biblical landscape for Christian Americans. The scope widened and the writers began to navigate the essence of the Arabic culture in particular and the Islamic faith in general.

The most important and central British figures that influenced the evolution of the American version of Orientalism were Thomas Moore and Lord Byron. These two writers were immensely popular in the United States as they were in Britain (Kleitz, 1988). Their influence was decisive in extending the oriental experience to the American readership in the 19th century and beyond. They injected American literature with the early images of the Orient, and they simultaneously paved the way for more exploration of Islamic culture. More importantly, different government entities were receptive to this British influence. Kleitz (1988) explained that the American educational system had much to do with shaping the 19th century images of the Orient. He argued that schools, colleges, and universities built their curriculums around the famous McGuffey readers that included oriental tales based on *The Arabian Nights* (Kleitz, 1988).

2.1 The Exotic Oriental Nights: Poe's Threshold

Edgar Allan Poe is regarded as one of the earliest American writers to manipulate oriental aesthetics and write about Islamic culture. Though it was not a direct influence, *The Arabian Nights* had a great effect on Edgar Allan Poe. The allusions to this oriental text appeared in almost all his works. The Arabian tales even became a literary touchstone for him; he referred to them in letters and journals. Poe clearly represented the 19th century American hunger for exoticism. His poems 'To Helen', 'Al Aaraaf', and 'Israfel' reflected his manipulation of the exotic oriental landscape to imbue his verse with mystery and allure. Poe was profoundly influenced by Thomas Moore, and like Poe, Moore had never visited the Orient. Moore's oriental romance 'Lalla Rookh' was central to Poe's version of Orientalism, sparking an interest in the Middle East and foregrounding more versions of American Orientalism(s). Seven of Poe's tales can be easily identified as oriental tales. Among these were 'A Tale of Jerusalem' and 'The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade' in which the oriental setting was used as a landscape. Kleitz (1988) identified that in Poe's tales, the Orient was an exotic and romantic location where almost anything could take place. The structure and style of the Arabian tales provided him with ample materials to experiment with and offered new literary works to his readership.

Another important factor that drew the Americans' attention to the Orient emerged from the war against the Barbary States in North Africa. The United States' involvement in the Barbary countries in North Africa drew American national attention, and this introduced the Orient as a setting for the further creation of tales of adventure. As Kleitz (1988) pointed out, the earliest American oriental tales were simply moral and spy tale, but other types of tales appeared, including historical, religious, and romantic tales which gained more popularity. The Barbary Wars definitely established the Orient as an enemy in the American psyche, and the writers were very quick to manipulate the growing sentiment and mold it in their literary

works. Americans of the 19th century began to respond to the depictions of the Orient and it shaped their idea of the whole area. However, 19th century American romantic Orientalism appeared largely as a popular phenomenon with little depth (Kleitz, 1988). The damaging myths and dehumanizing stereotypes in Poe's fiction and many other sources caricatured the Orient, and this had been the raw material for Hollywood movies. The aim was to move beyond the European orientalist paradigm and problematize Poe's re-visiting of *The Arabian Nights*.

2.2 The American Orientalism

The study of the Orient in the United States in the 19th century was not systematic as in Europe. This phenomenon, according to Kleitz (1988), resulted mainly in some exotic travel books, flurry poems, and tales inspired by the mysteries of Egypt and *The Arabian Nights*. It is clear that 19th century American Orientalists, including Poe, were profoundly affected by the growing Western contact with the Orient, but very few Americans of this period had personal experiences in the Orient. The Orient was mostly a made-up world that, to varied degrees, met the psychological and spiritual demands of American writers in a way that the West could not (Kleitz, 1988). American writers of the 19th century relied heavily on European translations and adaptations of *The Arabian Nights*. Their experience with the Orient remained largely based on abstractions. Nevertheless, this phenomenon continued in the United States, and it also incorporated new forms and various sources of representation. According to Makdisi and Nursbaum (2008), *The Arabian Nights* continued to be abridged and re-imagined in children's books all over the world. This reflected the approach that American literature took in shaping a perspective of the Orient. Though no direct contact with the Orient was recorded, American literature followed the same European colonial features, mainly the English and French works of literature.

Since its publication, *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978) has become a classic in the fields of postcolonial studies and many others. A significant portion of the work deftly follows the emergence of Western stereotypes of the East and explains how the unfavorable portrayals of Arabs in particular have persisted in literature, cinema, and other forms of media. It is crucial to remember that the American heritage of Orientalism differs from that of the British and the French, as outlined by Said (1978). The American experience in Eastern nations has been characterized as being significantly less direct and hence focused on abstractions (Alghaberi & Mukherjee, 2022). On the other hand, during the colonial era, the British and the French had numerous extended cultural exchanges with various nations in the East. Little (2008, p. 11) demonstrated that "in 1776 what the average American knew about the Middle East and its peoples likely came from two sources: the *King James Bible* and Scheherazade's *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*".

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* is one of the texts that emerged under a second-hand influence, yet it contributed much to the ostracizing of the Orient and the persistence of stereotypes in the United States. It is argued that the American version of Orientalism can be traced to Poe's writing. Apart from European Orientalism, the American Orientalists appropriated the Oriental discourse to render it devoid of truth and authentic representations. Poe is a significant example in this regard for two main reasons. First, he had been influential for many generations of writers. Second, he exaggerated the ways of reconstructing the Orient

literature in a form that suited imperial purposes. His short story was rather a criticism of the oriental discourse, its construction, and reconstruction. Since his source of information about the Orient was based on fiction, the authenticity of his portrayal could be easily questioned. Poe's creation of the fantasy Orient means shaping the national imagination of the Americans, a case whose repercussions were manifested in the racial profiling and discrimination in the United States of today.

3. METHODS

Various modes of reading and approaches were used to critically interpret the primary text. Orientalism and postcolonial theories provided a theoretical framework for the study and the deconstructive approach was applied in certain contexts to deconstruct and counter the stereotyping and the mythologizing of the Orient. [Edgar Allan Poe's \(1845\) *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade*](#) was critically studied in relation to the influences on Poe and the influences of his works on other writers. The article offered a critical reading of Poe's Orientalism and how he was influenced by the European version of Orientalism. The textual analysis situated and located the oriental reflections in Poe's writing.

The influence that *The Arabian Nights* exerted upon different cultures and literary traditions all over the world is widely acknowledged. Antoine Galland's translation of this masterpiece opened new avenues for numerous adaptations, recreations, and simulations, making it influential in the West. However, the reception of *The Arabian Nights* did not go without criticism and distortion. Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, not only used the text as a springboard for new creations but also invested in appropriating the oriental aesthetics and the rich oral tradition of the East. His interest in exoticizing the Middle East where *The Arabian Nights* emerged is not innocent at least from a postcolonial perspective. This study offered a deconstructive reading of Poe's text, an attempt to re-interpret *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* in post-colonial paradigms as well.

4. RESULTS

4.1 The Exotic Oriental Nights: Poe's Threshold

4.1.1 Poe's early mystics

Edgar Allan Poe was a scholar of the classics. He was deeply rooted in the Western canon, and a significant portion of his adult life was spent hopelessly bound up with the Anglo-American canon, both of which had a clear impact on his writing and literary imagination. His early poems bore a close resemblance to those of Lord Byron and P. B. Shelley. Interestingly, Poe's knowledge or awareness of other nations came mainly through his reading of both non-fiction and literary classics and masterpieces of them.

Edgar Allan Poe has always inspired American writers of fantasy to the point that they use the invented exotic nature that *The Arabian Nights* has about the Orient to the West. This has been perpetuated by Orientalist writers as realistic features of the

whole Orient, ignoring all about the Orient's diversities and cultures. This issue has been the crux for post-colonial writers who have noticed the amount of prejudice used in Orientalists' writings against the East. The *Arabian Nights* stories have mistakenly been regarded as a representative of the real Orient.

Making the unreal realistic in the minds of readers is not a difficult task; however, it needs a systematic and continuous perpetuation to make readers believe that the world of exoticism exists somewhere in the East. The stories of *The Arabian Nights* were translated at the beginning of the 18th century by Antoine Galland into French (1704-17). It was then translated into English within the same period by an anonymous 'Grub Street' translator and into many other languages. One might wonder why would these fantasy stories become this important to be translated into a number of languages in such a manner. The significance of these stories relies not only on being entertaining but also on something else that the translators needed; the power of exoticism propagated by a colonial enterprise. The characterization, style, and events of the stories are all charming to readers; something new that they do not find in their normal lives. The use of fantasy in *The Arabian Nights* enabled writers to think of new settings and create new worlds that suit children's literature and popular and folk literature. The real East had no longer been a real place in the minds of Orientalists; they misrepresented it and invented a fictitious East corresponding to their interest and attitudes in 'othering' different cultures. Hence, stories in *The Arabian Nights* have become real in the minds of Western readers depending on the stereotyped images drawn and perpetuated in Orientalists' writings.

Without experiencing or knowing about the real Orient by themselves, Western readers are exposed to the imaginative Orient that has already been woven into the travel narratives in which writers had never actually visited the Orient. The readers solely depended on *The Arabian Nights* and similar tales for knowledge of the Orient. Writers and readers of such tales found a new form of literature as a source of entertainment and information about what lay overseas. They found depictions of the estrangement and otherness that they liked in the Orient. [Moussa-Mahmoud \(1988\)](#) suggested that readers will enjoy seeing and hearing them without having to go out of their way to look for them abroad. The Nights' tremendous imaginative force, the dazzling magnificence of its descriptions, and the realistic and cozy ambiance of some of the stories have persisted in capturing the imagination of Europeans to this day.

4.1.2 Conceptualizing the Orient through travel narrative

Travel narratives did nothing but confirmed the images of the nights because the writers who wrote them had to read about the Orient before visiting it. They had already constructed a certain picture of the place and people that they might encounter later. In addition, most of the writers of travel narratives like George Orwell, James Capper, and Mary Wortley Montagu had their own aims prior to visiting the Orient. When they wrote down their experiences in the Far East, they wrote them based on the ideologies they already had and colonial purposes. The Orient was fixated on an Orientalist framework constructed to serve certain purposes. Writers were expected to supply the readers with something exotic; something different that is not relatable to Western culture and philosophy. Poe was able to capture and draw upon the European oriental constructions. His story is a reflection of the excessive interest in mystifying the Orient.

In their book, [Kennedy and Warner \(2013\)](#) identified that the most noticeable negative images are magic, romance, Jennies, ignorance bloodthirsty people, and anything that relates to supernatural events in the East. This study suggested that the colonial ambition in creating the Exotic Orient was the reason behind such influences and these impacts were politically planned to serve colonial interests. Colonial powers had to silence other nations and worked hard to convince them that colonization was in their interests. This is reflected in literary discourse, creating stories to also persuade the local European community of the colonial endeavors using the soft power of literature.

The versions emerging after Halland's translation remain derivative appropriations that testify to the significance of *The Arabian Nights* as a literary source of entertainment even if they carry elements of political and cultural inferiority. The colonial interests, aesthetic appropriation, and a sense of inferiority dominate the reception of the tales in Europe and the United States as well. In sum, the numerous translations of *The Arabian Nights*, re-creation and appropriations, adaptations, and travel narratives all 'inferiorized' and 'othered' the Orient, depicting an entire ethnicity as evil, foolish, and savage. The Orient is clearly fetishized and caricatured not merely to garner wider readership/viewership and revenues to authors, publishers, and producers, but it also served in creating cultural dichotomies 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there' which are part of the colonial enterprise. Though the name of Poe's work *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* ([Poe, 1845](#)) is similar to its inspiring stories of *The Arabian Nights*, we cannot make a direct comparison between the two. Poe's story is easily evaluated as satirical, mocking the final scenes of *The Arabian Nights*. Nothing more is added to Poe's work, except making more exoticism to the original story of Scheherazade and making its ending scenes bloodier, depriving the Sultan of any kind of mercy presented in the original work of *Alf Layla Wa Layla*. This rendition is a compulsion to demonize the Orient. The preoccupation with depicting the Orient as violent is perhaps a sign of the power relationship between the Orient and the Occident.

In all the tales and poems, Poe's relationship and understanding of the Orient were merely virtual. Abstract imaginations were drawn from the translations of *The Arabian Nights* and the Holy Quran, and the classics available at Poe's disposal. Poe never visited the Orient and never experienced the cultural specificities of the East. The problem with some critics is that they do not relate the concept of 'Orientalism' with any kind of political stance. The majority thinks of Orientalists' literary works as sources of knowledge about the Orient, considering *The Arabian Nights* as a demographic and ethnographic book that tells facts about the Orient. This, unfortunately, blurred the distinction between the 'real' and the 'imagined'.

The popularity of the tales spread swiftly throughout Europe in particular and they inspired numerous imitations, stage adaptations, and collections of tales in different parts of the world. This popularity, as [Kleitz \(1988\)](#) pointed out, affected every major writer of the eighteenth and 19th centuries to certain degrees. Many writers were obliged to at least make references to the Arabian tales and their charming characters in order to reach a wider readership and gain fame. However, such pressure on writers made them sway away from the original tales and blend in their own creations to fulfill the needs of the readers and publishers.

The Orient is defined by a collection of recurrent images and cliches, and how colonialism and imperialism put this knowledge of the Orient into effect subsequently

(Moosavinia et al., 2011). Orientalism refers to the portrayal of the Self or Occident and the Other or Orient, where the Self is given preference and the upper hand in order to define and reimagine the submissive, silent, and weak Other. For Said (1978), this geographical line between the Occident and the Orient is arbitrary, and many Western scholars, orientalists, including Burton, Lane, Lyall, and Massignon, as well as writers like Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Austin, Flaubert, Kipling, and Conrad, have contributed to forming and/or misrepresenting the Orient in the discourse (Moosavinia et al., 2011). Thus, misrepresenting the Orient has been a task that has never been innocent because it has been going through a systematic process of depicting the other and perpetuating it to a sense that looks realistic for Western and American readers. Besides, through explorations, and expansion of colonialism, the West managed to know about the Orient. This knowledge about all that concerns the Orient helped greatly in controlling it. The knowledge of Daniel Butt in *Colonialism and Postcolonialism* (Butt, 2013) maintains, 'is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power' (p. 9). The power determines what the reality of both East and West might be. Knowledge of the Orient was generated out of this cultural strength, "in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (Ashcroft et al., 2003, p. 188). The power relationship is often invested to demarcate a superior culture. In her comment on Poe's writing, Leidecker (1936) argued that if Poe had much knowledge of Persia and Persian literature, he would not divulge it in his writings. She observed that every reference in Poe's poems and stories seems to disclose knowledge received second or third-hand. Poe, in this regard, wrote his texts exclusively to American readers regardless of cultural authenticity. Nonetheless, Poe's tales constructed a particular Orient in the American Psyche which still reverberates in various pop culture forms. *The Arabian Nights* are recommended to be read to know about the Orient, and of course, Poe's oriental works are read for the same purpose, namely to read about the constructed Orient which exists only in literary texts.

4.2 Poe's Discursive Intertextuality

4.2.1 Re-framing *The Arabian Nights*

Edgar Allan Poe, an American writer, first published *The Thousand and One-Half Tale of Scheherazade* in the Philadelphia magazine Godey's Lady's Book in February 1845. It was marketed as a follow-up to *The Thousand and One Nights*, which detailed the exploits of well-known character Sinbad the Sailor. In the story, on the thousand and second night after her wedding, Scheherazade told her husband, the King, a story in which Sinbad traveled the world on what he believed to be the back of a monster. Sinbad was unaware that he was actually voyaging on a steamship from the 19th century. He witnessed and heard about numerous events that, based on Sinbad's accounts, appeared to be fantasies. All of the astounding happenings that Sinbad detailed were explained in the story's thirty-four footnotes as being historical truths or scientific facts from the 19th century. Allan Poe's short story started where *The Arabian Nights'* tale ended. Poe provided a summary of the Arabian tales, and Scheherazade brought Sinbad back. She took the story into strange and amazing places, and each episode became more fantastic. Nevertheless, the King grew skeptical of the weird creatures and the eerie lands. He then accused Scheherazade of telling lies and subsequently ordered her death.

Poe began his story by invoking an old saying below:

- (1) "...truth is stranger than fiction." (Poe, 1845, p. 1).

The story is simply a satirical variation of *The Arabian Nights*. In *The Arabian Nights*, the main character, Scheherazade, wed an envious King who—as he had done for his past wives—sentenced her to death the day following the wedding. She recited a story on the evening of their wedding, and the King delayed her demise until the next day so that she might complete it. By spinning tales for 1,001 nights, she managed to stay alive. These stories were bred between fairytales and fantasy stories, celebrated as pioneering examples of Arabic literary tradition. Scheherazade in *The Arabian Nights* was depicted as a creative and charming damsel whose wit won her husband's trust. As a result, she survives by telling the stories. The feminist inquiry posited Scheherazade's role in constructing and controlling the tales as a triumphant narrative in which Scheherazade turned from a helpless to a powerful woman.

In Poe's short story, Scheherazade met a drastic fate due to a change in the storyline. The King's skepticism grew when he heard unusual twists in Sinbad's adventures. Poe injected his story with 19th century inventions which the King found nonsense. The King frequently interrupted the story with outbursts which clearly showed his disapproval and uneasiness with the exaggeration that did not resemble the Sinbad stories in the Arabian tales. Despite the King's interruptions, Scheherazade continued to recount the Sinbad story, but it eventually drove the kind wary. The King no longer found interest in the adventures of Sinbad and he ordered 'throttling' Scheherazade. Poe's addition of a second night to the one thousand nights and one bitterly served the fate of Scheherazade.

Poe's story was premised on two narrative frames that attempted to establish the story as an addition to *The Arabian Nights*. The invention of the 'Tellmenow Isitsöornot' foregrounds the narrator's quest in the frame of 'some Oriental investigations' to discover an old text telling the truth about Scheherazade's fate. The unnamed narrator also used the frame story of Sinbad to re-creates tales by mixing 19th century inventions. The introduction of Western inventions in the storyline upset the King, and he no longer found the stories interesting.

Poe began his story by using meta-fiction as a technique to startle the readers and prepare him/her for his narrative; "truth is stranger than fiction" (Poe, 1845, p. 1). Poe's story took the form of an epilogue to the Near Eastern and Indian folktales of *The Thousand and One Nights* (Pangborn, 2010). He attempted to destabilize the trust and beliefs of the readers in order to accept new truths and claims he proposed. By referring to the truth as stranger than fiction, he subsequently proposed certain claims in a satirical manner to question the originality and ridicule the popularity of *The Arabian Nights*. He referred to 'Tellmenow Isitsöornot' which was completely his invention to base his claims. This book did not exist at all, and Edgar Allan Poe invented it as a joke in *The Thousand-And-Second Tale of Scheherazade*. Poe pretended to draw the story of Scheherazade from this book which undoubtedly disclosed Poe's intentions to distort the Arabian original story. Poe underlined the aim of his short story in the very first pages. He believed that he had discovered a literary error, and he thought it was his concern to rectify that error:

- (2) "I was not a little astonished to discover that the literary world has hitherto been strangely in error respecting the fate of the vizier's daughter, Scheherazade, as that fate is depicted in *The Arabian Nights*". (Poe, 1845, p. 8).

This kind of discovery was rather an attempt to access the Arabian tale and shape it into an Oriental mold serving the interest of the neo-American version of Orientalism. He tenderly referred to his reader as 'inquisitive', signaling a detour to present a new plotline for *The Arabian Nights* which is widely known to readers in Europe and different parts of the world. The 'inquisitively' that Poe evoked dragged the readers to an alternative reading of the Arabian tale, one that is awkward and silly. Poe's deconstruction of *The Arabian Nights* was understood rather within an imperialist frame that attempted to render the whole system of Orientalism devoid of any truth and artistic values.

Poe's short story might be read as a distortion since it did not fall within an appropriative paradigm. Providing a summary of a popular classic text and proposing a horrible ending to that text depending on an ill-informed Oriental depiction revealed much about the reception of Arabic literature in America. Although Poe was mainly influenced by British Orientalists, he surpassed them and founded his own type of Orientalism. British writers resorted to oriental aesthetics and Islamic artistic creations for inspiration, whereas Poe ridiculed and satirized *The Arabian Nights* and devalued its artistic and literary essence. His constructed half-image of the Arabs and their culture overshadows his short story, leading him to suggest a fate for Scheherazade, the main character in *The Arabian Nights*. It is therefore imperative to highlight the ideological impetus behind Poe's re-writing of Scheherazade as a character and re-designing of *The Arabian Nights* as a literary text.

Pangborn (2010) argued that English writers accessed an orientalist discourse for two main reasons related to imperialism and modernity. This interpretation contends that Poe's story was an effort to advance imperialist goals and to combat a more chaotic and alienating modernization. Poe did not seem satisfied with the fate of Scheherazade as depicted in *The Arabian Nights*. He used her character to extend the tale for another night to design his desired fate for the character that he thought was typical of the Eastern King. By doing this, Poe's aim in the story was to reinforce the inferior Eastern other and to propagate an imperialist American policy for a newly emerging nation.

4.2.2 Caricaturing the Orient

In Poe's fiction, the Orient was employed to deliver cheap laughter and vilify any culture that is different from American norms. Schueller (2001) pointed out that Poe was interested in politics. He had his own political journalism which was not away from the imperial interests that the USA had embraced since its growth. Poe, for instance, was obsessed with oriental discourse; an obsession that he inherited from European influence.

In his works, Poe repeatedly presented images of the Orient in a distorted manner. He, through the characterization of Scheherazade, sexualized the whole East by attempting to further expose the notion of 'Harem' which is a common theme in the oriental discourse. Schueller (2001) noted, "yet, Poe's tales were also influenced by the vogue for Egyptology and the interest in missionary and quasi-missionary travel to the Near East, just as were the writing of Cummins, Deforest, Murray, and Ware.

Like many of his contemporaries, Poe had a deep interest in the Near East” (p. 21). The obsessive interest in the Orient is indicative of the colonial legacy, and it can be revealed when texts are read critically. There should not necessarily be explicit similarities between the Orientalists’ works and the works influencing each other due to intercultural exchange. However, hegemonic ideologies are usually uncovered in texts emerging from Europe and the United States. Clearly, the similarities between Poe’s tales and *The Arabian Nights* “do not depend primarily upon references and allusions or upon resemblance which may arbitrarily exist between particular stories” (Marzolph et al., 2004, p. 66). More essential than that is the relationship. It comes from a fundamental understanding that goes beyond just the purpose of fiction and the kinds of resources that best support the art of the storyteller. It is concerned with the nature of a man himself.

Poe might have used the title and style of *The Arabian Nights* while narrating his own work, but he recreated the work to serve certain his aims. By following the European model, he rather originated a new version of Orientalism in the United States. Though his story of Scheherazade was short compared to the stories of *The Arabian Nights*, he managed to make it more exotic and more violent. He directed the readers that all these extraordinary events, supernatural creatures, human greed, violence, and submissiveness were found in the Near East, and the mission of the American/Western man was to go there and make things good as the colonial discourses entailed.

Said (1978, p. 271) posited that “the representations of Orientalism in European (American) culture amounts to what we can call a discursive consistency, one that has not only history but material (and institutional) presence to show for itself”. ‘Discursive consistency’ in colonial literature is framed by the mythically exotic images of the Orient, especially when it is supported by the mysterious and fantasy stereotypes that have been operated on the Oriental. In Poe’s works, the Orient was re-invented and re-constructed. Stereotypes were thereby revived. Eventually, Poe’s poems and short stories all perpetuated the negative oriental representations. His obsession with the Orient was not reflected as aesthetic appreciation but rather an appropriation that was distorted and never restored. Poe’s oriental discourse was only examined lately by Arab critics of American literature, and more specifically, it surfaced through translations of his works into Arabic. Through stereotypical duplication in the world of realism, a fake Orient appeared in the world of reality.

In his *Le Harem Colonial: Images d’un sous-erotisme*, Alloula (1981) focused on how different travel books, photographers, and writers were all interested in exoticizing the Orient. He pointed out that “what he (the photographer of some French postcards of Algerian women) brings back from his expedition is but a harvest of stereotypes that express both the limits of fabricated realism and those of models frozen in the hieratic poses of death” (p. 35). The clichéd images of Eastern women in books like *The Arabian Nights* and *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* are part of a cultural onslaught inherited from a colonial legacy. Photographers tried to depict Algerian women in the same way that orientalists had done in the past, turning the reality of poor, innocent colonized women into lustful, seductive half-naked women in order to make their imaginations come to life. Alloula realized that Algerian women were framed as idle that lie adorned as if ready for unending festivities, the harem is deeply fascinating and equally disturbing (Alloula, 1981). It seems that most of the Western expeditions to the Middle East were all invested in proving that *The*

Arabian Nights is a real depiction. Such orientation blurred the boundaries between *The Arabian Nights* as a fiction and the Orient as a reality that exists. Their writings became historical and geographical records for all those who want to know about or visit the East. Hence, there is a lack of scholarly deliberation that is critical and appreciative. More importantly, the Arab world had really failed to represent itself and confront the European and American machine of stereotypes. The oil, wealth, and hi-tech cities in the Gulf countries had not helped but added layers to the mystery and fascination in the Orient, resulting in new images and stereotypes.

Further examination of Poe's *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* reveals that it is a historical record of the 'Other' rather than being just mere fantasy stories for entertainment. Poe never made a reference to the specificities of other countries and nations in Asia and North Africa. His lack of firsthand experience led him to consider all these places as having one culture and one entity. However, the Middle East, being the birthplace of Christianity, is of greater significance to Poe. It is appealing to him, yet the influence of European oriental discourse on him renders it 'different'. Apart from religiosity, Poe's interest in the Orient is ascribed to his attempts to buy readership. The popularity of the Arabian tales in the 19th century obliged Poe to re-create and render the tales so that they reach the readers directly. His rendering of a story in *The Arabian Nights* into *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* gives us an idea about Poe's approach to the Orient. His re-creation of Scheherazade is appealing yet it recycles several images and stereotypes in the European oriental discourse.

Therefore, the perpetuation of the newly-framed images of *The Arabian Nights* is continued in *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* and the other works of Poe, authorizing the colonial discourse in the minds of Western/American people who are made certain that the Orient truly needs to be freed from its people who had already been dehumanized. Hegemony thus gains legitimacy and is formally exercised, especially in light of the Orient's failure to successfully project itself to the globe during the previous two centuries. Neocolonialist manifestations (military, economic, and cultural) are now being justified by the newly created frame and false representation of the East. Even Arabs themselves contribute to the growing scholarship of Orientalism. There are scholars who work for this enterprise, acting as cultural informants in American and European universities. More importantly, the American and Western mainstream media after 9/11 presented a refashioned Orientalist propaganda in line with the Bush's administration 'War on Terror' in the Middle East. In addition to this, Keskin (2018) argued that neo-Orientalist perspectives on 'liberating Muslim women from Muslim men' was one of the driving forces of the 'War on Terror' and led to a variety of responses from postcolonial feminists and critics of American imperialism.

4.2.3 Poe's influences on later genres of Orientalist works

By examining Poe's influences on later genres of literature, we can understand that Poe's works have become sources of study within which there are various oriental representations that have their own impacts on the minds of Poe's admirers and readers. Writing does not remain words on pages, but they become a part of the readers' experience, mentality, thoughts, and behavior. Cultures are mainly constructed by thoughts that are transferred from the world of realism to construct a

new reality. Critics must come to terms with the fact that Poe used his fiction to support human oppression. It is thus not just the conventionality of Poe's racist and imperialist fantasies that we should condemn but also the extent to which Poe has employed his undisputed powers as a creative writer to weave such fantasies into what has for so long been appreciated for its aesthetic qualities (Ginsberg, 2002). Literature thus becomes a constructor of new ways of thinking rather than being just a source of entertainment. The literary abilities that Poe enjoyed have facilitated his outreach to a wider American readership, authors, and media which, in return, absorbed Poe's creative thoughts, political stands, and Orientalist discourses. Poe's imagination and political thoughts were shaped by his orientalist readings and participation in the 19th century American oriental discourse.

Consequently, the images that the American literature derived from Poe's orientalist works continued perpetuating the same clichés and frames about the Orient. In Poe's poems and stories, the Orient is so exotic that it is full of "poisoned arrows and poisonous snakes" and "millions of black and yellow men, beards, turbans, temples, and colonial skirmishes fill out Poe's Orientalist fantasy" (Mernissi, 2001). Ziter (2003), however, argued that "the precision of his historical events is unusual amid the huge volume of xenophobic Western writings about the exotic and mysterious Orient" (p. 93). The images of the Orient supplied by the appropriations of *The Arabian Nights* had become a fascinating option to break the monotony and offer something new for those who want to know about the East. This obsession emerged from a need to explore the exotic, romantic, supernatural creatures, and magic in another part of the world. Unfortunately, this led to the creation of a polarizing discourse of 'us' and 'them', 'here' and 'there'.

More importantly, the American version of Orientalism is deeply politicized and hence reflects dehumanizing portrayals of the Orient as a whole. Poe borrowed his Oriental tropes and images from British writers and his writing later contributed to the founding of the American version of Orientalism which is much less direct and based on abstractions.

Poe himself was a text rather than just an author of his works. He was aware of what he was writing because he was a critic whose writings in poetry, prose, or fiction are full of debatable discourses that aim at shaping the way of thinking of the new generations of America. Poe's interest was directed toward the most strange and odd mysteries. All that was incomplete, unresolved, unexplained, unchallenged, Poe was bound to complete it with his imagination; thus, he had narrated mysterious secret documents of inexplicable crimes and discoveries. Poe also tracked out the possibilities of mesmerism, and the prospects of Ariel's navigation — such themes fell under his interests and appealed to his readers (Peeples, 2004). Poe's *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* is thus according to Peeples' prediction a completion of *The Arabian Nights* which Poe thought of as incomplete; hence, he added another night where Scheherazade should commit a mistake in front of the King who was no longer amused by her story and thus ordered her execution.

5. CONCLUSION

The study aimed at exploring the Oriental influences on Edgar Allan Poe and how he received such influences and internalized them. Poe is considered a central

figure in 19th century American literature, and he can be credited with foregrounding the American version of Orientalism. Though he had no firsthand experience in the Orient, he relied heavily on the translations of *The Arabian Nights* and other Oriental works. In addition, his readings and study of classics enabled him to create his own version of Orientalism. The emergence of American Orientalism can be traced to Edgar Allan Poe's works. *The Arabian Nights* is no longer a source of aesthetic values, but it has been used as a repertoire of stereotypes and dehumanizing images. The difficulty of separating politics from Oriental discourse demonstrated how the boundaries between the American depiction of the Orient and reality had all been blurred. Even feminist studies had failed in examining the character of Scheherazade outside the sensual paradigm and sexual representation. Moreover, oriental aesthetics was appropriated for commercial gain, and Scheherazade and Arabian lore were very often the targets. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* clearly reflected the reconstructions and re-creations of the oriental discourse and how it was eventually rendered devoid of any truth or authentic representation. The Orient provided Poe with an exotic landscape and the mysterious allure that readers received well. His fiction drew the public attention to the Orient as a setting for magic and marvelous tales of fantasy. Poe's concept of 'Arabesque' is not only central to understanding his works but also to 19th century American Orientalism.

In an attempt to explain the 19th century American interest in the Orient, it is realized that it springs either from the significance of the holy land to Christianity or due to an excessive obsession with the exotic. For some writers, the interest in the Orient is connected to a personal search for a spiritual source. Nevertheless, there are many other reasons which explain the subsequent interest in the Middle East, such as the institutionalization of Orientalism, the emergence of the United States as a superpower, and the creation of Israel in the Middle East. The study was limited to a literary analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's oriental attitude. Poe's *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade* is the primary text in this study, and further studies would find more recent literary works to critically examine how American Orientalism survived through the ages. In addition, caricaturing the Arab/Orient in American pop culture is a further scope worthy of exploration.

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