

## Stylistic Features of Edgar Allan Poe's Lyrics and his Significance in World Literature

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**Annotation:** The work of American poet and writer Edgar Allan Poe is of great interest to literary scholars and translators the world over. His contribution to the world literature is undoubted, his ideas still have an impact on the world culture. This article focuses on the role of Edgar Allan Poe in world poetry, his influence on Russian poetry, in particular his stylistic innovations, as well as the problems of translating his works, the key features that the translator should consider when starting to work on the lyrics of Edgar Allan Poe.

**Keywords:** Literature, lyrics, genre, poem, Allan Poe, harmony.

The iconic figure of world literature, the founder of a number of new genres, America's first professional writer, a marvelous combination of poetic genius and mathematical harmony, a knight of logic, a wanderer in the labyrinths of the subconscious, a man whose work was of little contemporary interest and will always be remembered by descendants Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe's worldwide fame and recognition, which he received, unfortunately, after his death, gave rise to the misleading impression of him as a prolific author. Yet he wrote very little. Poe's poetic canon numbers just over fifty works, among which we find only two relatively long poems - Tamerlane and Al Aaraf. The rest are relatively small lyric poems of varying merit. Thomas Eliot once remarked that of all Edgar Poe's poems 'only half a dozen were a real success. Yet no poem, no poem in the world, has had a wider readership, and not so firmly settled in the memory of men, as these few poems of Poe.' [2,10]

Poe was most prolific during the last twelve years of his life. During those years he lived in New York, Boston, Philadelphia - the centers of the bourgeois North whose ideals were deeply alien to him - he was a convinced retrograde, an "aristocrat of the spirit". The rejection of this new society, the decline of Old Dominion ideals - all reflected in Poe's lyrics and short stories. The problem of duality became a defining feature of Poe's work. His disagreement with bourgeois America began with an aesthetic evaluation of reality and his definition of the role of art in life. He contemptuously called American businessmen "lovers of money"; he spoke of how the dollar had become the country's banner, and if there is no blood aristocracy in the United States, there is "dollar aristocracy, boasting of wealth". There is no place for poetry and beauty in this world. Meanwhile, without poetry, life is defective, incomplete. One needs, as in the air, the beauty; poetry is what ennobles us. [2,12]

Poe was criticized for his tendency to formalism, mechanicality, as he considered the main goal of the poet to preserve the unity and integrity of the artistic impression, consisting in the harmony of content and form, with the latter paying no less attention. He consistently defended his thesis about the need for deep, gradual and methodical work on a poem, as opposed to the widespread opinion that poems are created in a "rush of high madness".

Poe's aim was "to prove beyond doubt that none of the moments in its creation can be assigned to chance or intuition, that the work, step by step, proceeded to completion with the precision and brutal consistency with which mathematical problems are solved. [8,64]

Poe often repeated that the lot of poetry is to embody the beautiful. By beautiful he meant order, proportionality and harmony. He rejected any disproportion, any lack of proportion, including pathos. Love for harmony and disgust for chaos, Poe believed, were given to man by nature itself. In his poems proportion, identity, repetition reigns, and rhythm, rhyme, size and line are only forms of expression of the idea of equality.

The artistic impression (or "effect", as Poe defined it), according to him, was to help the reader comprehend something inexpressible, to rise above the mundane world - this reveals Poe's belonging to late romanticism. "Effect" is the cornerstone of Edgar Poe's poetics. All elements of a work are subordinated to it, from the theme, plot, to formal moments such as the volume of the poem, stanza, rhythmic structure, use of metaphors, etc. Everything must work for a complete master, and the master is the "effect", i.e. the concentrated emotional impact of the poem on the reader. [28;8,120] Poe sees the poem not as an object of intellectual or emotional mastery, but as a kind of magical influence or mesmeric suggestion.

According to Tatyana Zyryanova, one of the ways to create a specific sound picture in her work on the general principles of verse sound expression, is the repetition of leitmotif language units, when a single dominant sound tone, corresponding to the main expressive line of the work, creates a particular play of sound and semantic tones already at the basic level. [4,88]

Taking into account that the material for its study was the poems of Russian symbolists (M. Voloshin, V. Brusov), who can be confidently called not only the most successful researchers of Poe's work, but also his pupils and followers, it is safe to say that the methods of creating sound expression were largely formulated by Poe himself. H. Auden, in his essay on the life and work of the American classic, states that none of Edgar Poe's contemporaries "spent so much energy and talent on ... knowing the laws of prosody and not making mistakes in the sound structure of the poem." [5,161] Thus, it seems quite logical and reasonable to claim that among the most striking features of Edgar Poe's lyricism is its musicality. "Poetry is the creation of beauty by means of rhythm," he asserted. [6,27] Indeed, Poe regarded the sonorous organisation of verse as a way of creating emotional subtext.

It is the intricate, precisely aligned combinations of rhythmic passages and alliterations, syntactically parallel constructions and refrains which allow for the desired effect, the effect of "mesmeric revelation" (the force of monotone). [1,28]

As G. M. Friedländer points out in *On Certain Problems of Poetics Today*, "when reading (or listening to) a poem, the reader simultaneously perceives its logical meaning and the 'magic' of its poetic speech - he feels the various, shifting shades of its rhythm, its language and verse, which are in a certain more or less complex interaction with the meaning." He also notes that "when a lyrical poem is read, certain lines appear in the reader's mind, filled with certain logical, emotional, intonational, expressive content, carrying on them certain musical and pictorial images, rhythmic accents and so on; then, as the work unfolds further, the semantic and rhythmic links between its individual parts strengthen and expand in our perception, and from the originally disparate elements a distinct image of the whole emerges." [1,18]. Often attempts to discover the secret of the musicality of Poe's poems have suffered a setback precisely because critics have limited themselves to examining "pure sound," disconnecting it from other elements of the artistic system, without noticing that sound, taken in isolation, "becomes empty," loses its emotional coloration and efficacy. Poe never compared poetry and music. He insisted that poetry was music combined with

thought. Many researchers of the basic principles of the sound organisation of poetic works note the interpenetration and indissoluble connection of the sound and semantic structures.

Tatiana Ziryanova, referring to Friedländer's article, also points out that when analysing a poem, one should take into account the rhythm, the pulse of the verse, and rhyme, and pay particular attention to these components of sound organisation, since stressed vowels, the basis of rhythm, are most informative, while the sounds that form rhyme are emphasised as meaningful. [3,18]

P. Jakobson in his work "Linguistics and Poetics" points out that rhythm and rhyme are nothing more than concentrated reflections of a common, basic feature of poetry - parallelism. In this respect, the scholar refers to the work of the English poet J. Hopkins (1865) in which he claims that rhythm ("repetition of syllables"), size ("repetition of rhythms"), and alliteration, assonance and rhyme - the main attributes of poetry - are largely responsible for "the corresponding repetition in words and in thoughts". [14;181]

Remaining true to his principle of "the singularity of the beautiful", E. Poe boldly experimented in the process of "rhythmic creation of beauty". He made ample use of a method of mixing sizes (choriambos), attempted to introduce tonic verse instead of syllabotonic, accepted in English poetry, and violated flowing poetic speech with line transpositions. The syllable transposition (the so-called "broken rhyme") invented by Poe was further developed in the work of famous poets.

Poe also attached great importance to the volume of a poem ("a long poem has no right to exist", "a long poem is a paradox" [1,71]. The main requirement - to retain the integrity of the impression - is fulfilled only if the work can be read in one sitting, while the gradation of emotional tension (particularly through those same refrains and variable parallel structures) plunges the reader deeper and deeper into a poetic reverie, hypnotizing him, like the measured and inexorable movements of the pendulum in one of Poe's novellas. He himself regarded a poem of about a hundred lines as ideal.

He also adopted a similarly rational approach to the subject of the poetic work. The idea of poetry as a tool for perceiving higher matter implies that the poet should address a narrow range of topics, consciously separating himself and the reader from everyday life. Thus, poetic affection, according to Poe, is love for an ideal image, a projection of which is the earthly woman, while he considered the loss of the beloved to be the most sublime theme. Intonation plays a major role in achieving the effect. E. Poe believed that a melancholic intonation is best suited here. "The beautiful of any kind in its highest expression invariably touches the sensitive soul to tears." [8,80]. The imagery in Poe's poetry is universal, lacking certainty, plot and designed to stimulate the reader's imagination through emotional implication ("mystical meaning"). "Believing that 'in uncertainty is the soul of poetry'," wrote the eminent American critic W. W. Brooks, "he sought to embrace the 'unknown, the obscure, the inexplicable'. The images in his poetry do not evoke images of reality, but conjure up associations that are vague, distant, ominous or melancholy, majestic or sad" [5,9296].

It is this ambiguity of images, the plotlessness of Poe's poetry together with the profound elaboration of prosody, that often became (and still is) the main focus of criticism of Poe's poetic heritage. Thus, the poet W. H. Auden, in his essay on the poet's life and work, sets out a viewpoint, unconventional for European literary scholarship, concerning both his works and his personality. Auden argues that Poe - "a talent swamped by day labour" - was unable to fully realise his intentions in lyricism because he had no opportunity to "get his hands on" low-profit poetry and was forced to engage in reviewing books of dubious artistic value in order to feed his family, confining himself to developing a theoretical framework of poetry essays and critical articles, which were later seen as a revelation in Europe. As an argument in favour of his thesis, Auden cites a fragment of the author's preface to one of the lifetime (1845) editions of Edgar Poe's poetry: 'In

honour of the style, it must be said that I do not consider this book a great value for the reading public, nor do I see any particular merit in it. Owing to circumstances beyond the control of my will, I have not at any period of my life had the opportunity of taking up quite seriously what in more favourable circumstances would have been my chosen field of activity." [2,9] As an illustration of Poe's "poetic failings" a passage from Poe's most famous poem, The Raven, is quaintly quoted:

*Not the little obeisance made he;  
not a minute stopped or stayed he  
But with mien of lord or lady,  
Perched above my chamber door.*

The critic cites 'the reason for the failure' as the fact that 'the author's considerable interest in subject matter and an equally considerable interest in prosody are not only inconsistent, but in conflict'. Auden believes that the narrator's speech, which should be "flowing and natural", is conveyed using feminine rhymes, quite rare in English verse, which does not contribute to the intended effect. For Auden, the fragment is "pure metric, and "neither the situation nor the image of the narrator can justify the semantic redundancy in the pairs "lordorlady" and "stoporstaydhe". [5, 9297]

However, Auden does not deny Poe's originality - while "'Ulalum' is only an experiment in diction," "no one but Poe could have written such poems." [2,10]

Such criticisms of Poe's style are undoubtedly noteworthy, but they are largely subjective. Artifice, contrivance, sophistication are the main arguments of critical scholars. But, as J. Hopkins wrote, "perhaps we would not be mistaken in saying that all techniques in poetry are artificial." [3,181] In any case, few would argue that Poe's poetry is a high art whose importance is difficult to exaggerate. And undoubtedly, translations of his works into other languages are necessary - the enormous influence of Poe on European poetry and, more importantly, the relevance of his innovative ideas to contemporary poetry testify to this. The complexity of the sound organization, due to the peculiarities of the English language, imposes certain limitations in translation, but the specificity of the images at the same time implies a certain freedom for the translator. Thus, translating Edgar Allan Poe's lyrics is a non-trivial task which presupposes certain linguistic skills and, more importantly, provides an opportunity to develop and improve these skills. Perhaps this is partly why there are so many translations of the American classic's rather small poetic heritage.

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