EASTERN MOTIFS IN THE POETRY OF ALEXANDER PUSHKIN: TYPOLOGICAL PARALLELS WITH THE WORKS OF ALISHER NAVOI

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Abstract. This article examines how "Eastern motifs" function in Alexander Pushkin's poetry and how these motifs can be read typologically alongside Alisher Navoi's poetics. Using comparative close reading, motif analysis, and a contextual approach drawn from recent scholarship on Russian literary Orientalism, the study identifies three parallel clusters: (1) the East as an aesthetic system (landscape, palace/garden imagery, symbolic objects), (2) ethical–humanistic discourse (mercy, fate, justice, spiritual testing), and (3) the poetics of love and inner freedom (love as suffering, loyalty, and moral trial). The findings suggest that Pushkin's "Eastern" texts are not only decorative exoticism but also a method of expanding Russian poetic form and meaning through hybrid imagery and culturally marked lexicon, while Navoi's classical Eastern poetics provide a stable "typological horizon" for interpreting these strategies.

The study contributes to current comparative discussions by clarifying how intercultural dialogue in literature can be described through recurrent motifs rather than direct influence alone.

Keywords: Pushkin, Navoi, Eastern motifs, comparative literature, typology, Orientalism, lyric poetry, humanism.

Interest in "Eastern motifs" in Pushkin is often linked to Romantic-era fascination with the Caucasus, Crimea, Persia, and Islam, but recent work stresses that Pushkin's engagement includes thematic and ideological functions rather than mere "exotic color" [Shagieva, 2025 - p. 361]. Linguistic research similarly argues that Pushkin's images of the East combine cultural reality, metaphor, and evaluative meaning, and that "orientalisms" in his language help build the architecture and expressive tone of the text [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 367].

For Navoi, the "East" is not an external attraction but the normative poetic world itself: a classical system of symbols (rose/nightingale, garden, wine as metaphor), ethical reflection, and refined rhetorical structure. Modern scholarship on Navoi continues to treat his legacy as a major vehicle of intercultural dialogue—especially through translation and cultural mediation [Kaxarova, 2024 - p. 98].

This article therefore asks: **How can Pushkin's "Eastern motifs" be described typologically—i.e., through functional parallels—when compared with Navoi's poetic system?** The goal is not to claim direct borrowing from Navoi by Pushkin (which would require documentary evidence), but to show how a typological lens reveals shared functions of imagery and themes across two different literary traditions.

A qualitative comparative study was conducted using three complementary procedures:

1. **Motif analysis**: identifying recurring "Eastern" motifs in Pushkin (Caucasus/Crimea landscapes, palace/garden settings, "Oriental" lexicon, Islamic/Quranic references) and mapping them to analogous motifs in Navoi's poetic system (garden/rose/nightingale, fate and moral testing, spiritualized love).

2. **Close reading (philological interpretation)**: examining how motifs work inside the text—what emotions, ethical positions, and narrative meanings they produce.

3. **Contextual interpretation**: situating the motifs within broader frameworks of Russian literary Orientalism and intercultural dialogue, using recent secondary scholarship.

"The Prisoner of the Caucasus," "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai," "Journey to Arzrum," selected lyrics associated with the Caucasus/Oriental settings, and Quranic-inspired lyric experiments. Scholarship notes that Pushkin's Eastern works develop across poetry and prose and are central to Russian Romantic "Oriental" imagination [Shagieva, 2025 - p. 360].

Ghazal tradition, the ethical–philosophical register of classical Eastern poetry, and narratives of love as moral trial (often associated with the broader *Khamsa* tradition). The study treats Navoi primarily as a **typological model** of Eastern poetic meaning-making rather than as a confirmed direct source for Pushkin.

Following recent linguistic and cultural studies of Pushkin's Eastern imagery, motifs were grouped into three categories:

A) Aesthetic system and setting; B) Ethical–humanistic discourse; C) Love and freedom as inner experience. These categories align with arguments that Pushkin's Eastern images act as worldview markers, not merely scenic description [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 368].

The East as an aesthetic system: landscape, palace, garden, and "chronotopic" markers. Recent analysis emphasizes that Pushkin uses Eastern landscapes and culturally marked details as a way to structure time–space ("chronotope") and intensify poetic perception [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 368]. In Pushkin's Caucasus/Crimea works, mountains, valleys, palaces, fountains, and enclosed spaces are not only background; they organize contrasts: freedom vs. captivity, passion vs. restraint, empire vs. local codes. Shagieva describes Pushkin's use of Eastern aesthetics as a contributor to his artistic vision in works like *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* [Shagieva, 2025 - p. 360].

Navoi's system is more stable and symbolic: the garden (as moral–spiritual space), the rose/nightingale pair (desire and suffering), and architectural or courtly imagery (order, etiquette, ethical hierarchy). Typologically, Pushkin's palace and garden imagery in the Crimean text functions similarly: it becomes a **stage for moral conflict** and a **container of memory**, where objects (a fountain, walls, chambers) hold emotional history.

In both poets, "Eastern" space becomes a *meaning machine*: it encodes emotion and ethics, not just geography. Pushkin achieves this through narrative scenic intensity; Navoi does so through symbolic convention.

A key recent line of scholarship links Pushkin's Eastern texts to moral questioning and spiritual reflection. Studies of Quranic themes in Russian literature underscore that the Quran is relevant for comparative approaches to Russian–Eastern literary dialogue and that Pushkin's "Imitations of the Koran" sits within a larger tradition of "mastering foreign artistic images" [Asadov, 2024 - p. 111]. Another study argues that Pushkin's engagement with Quranic "truths" is not simple imitation but reinterpretation: it becomes a way to rethink being, humanism, and moral universals [Rakhmanova, 2021 - p. 74]. Navoi's poetics—especially in the classical ghazal and ethical narrative traditions—regularly frames the human being as tested by fate, desire, power, and conscience. Typologically, Pushkin's Eastern texts often place characters within a moral laboratory: captivity, loyalty, jealousy, mercy, and the limits of violence. This resembles Navoi's ethical poetics, where love and suffering are frequently treated as moral education rather than romance alone.

The "East" serves as an ethical vocabulary: it allows both poets to speak about universal moral questions through culturally saturated imagery and narrative patterns.

Shagieva notes that in Pushkin the East is often represented as alluring, passionate, and emotionally "unrestrained," yet also capable of deep melancholic fatalism [Shagieva, 2025 - p. 365]. This creates a poetic field where love becomes a test of freedom: characters seek liberation from social constraint but enter new bondage through passion. Navoi's love poetics is famously double-layered: love can be earthly and spiritual at once, and suffering can become a path toward purification. The typological overlap appears in Pushkin when love is depicted not as a "happy ending" but as a force that reveals character and moral limits. Linguistic scholarship supports the idea that Pushkin's Eastern imagery is designed to carry value-meaning frameworks and "ethnic consciousness," not merely portray customs [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 367]. That is precisely where typological comparison with Navoi is productive: Navoi's established symbolic economy makes visible what Pushkin's Eastern lexicon and scenery *do*—they intensify the moral and emotional stakes.

Piavrai demonstrates that borrowed orientalisms in Pushkin are not only used to fill cultural gaps; they also shape textual expressiveness and aesthetic perception [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 367]. This is typologically close to Navoi's cultural mediation through language: modern scholarship describes Navoi's translation and adaptation practices as creating bridges between traditions and audiences [Kaxarova, 2024 - p. 98]. Even without claiming direct influence, we can describe a shared logic: both poets treat culturally marked language as a tool for building a richer semantic world, where words signal values, memory, and worldview.

A modern caution in comparative work is to avoid reducing "Eastern motifs" to a single ideology. Some Romantic Orientalism is undeniably built on exoticization. Yet recent studies argue that Pushkin differs from purely "conditional" or fantastical representations because he aims at nuance and credible detail, using Eastern settings to explore freedom, domination, and identity [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 368]. Shagieva similarly frames Pushkin's Eastern motifs as integrated into his artistic method and into the broader evolution of Russian literature [Shagieva, 2025 - p. 361].

From a wider Eurasian lens, scholarship on Russian-language poetry and "Oriental" cultural codes argues that Russian culture has long been shaped at a junction of East and West, and that "Orientalism" remains a strong historical factor in Russian literary development [Asanova et al., 2024 - p. 5]. While that work focuses on later contexts, it helps justify treating Pushkin's Eastern motifs as part of an enduring cultural mechanism, not an isolated Romantic fashion.

Navoi's poetics provides a stable system of symbols and ethical meanings that makes it easier to describe how "Easternness" operates as literature, not as geography. When Pushkin uses the East to intensify moral drama or metaphysical reflection—especially in Quranic-inspired lyric modes—his strategy aligns with an older Eastern tradition where poetry is expected to carry ethical and spiritual weight [Rakhmanova, 2021 - p. 74].

Thus the "parallel" is best described as **typological convergence**: two different literary cultures use a shared repertoire of motifs (garden, fate, sacred discourse, love-as-trial) to produce comparable effects.

This study does not claim documentary proof of Pushkin's direct reading of Navoi. The value of the comparison lies instead in describing functions of motifs and the ways "the East" becomes a poetic method. Future research can strengthen the argument by working with concrete translation histories of Navoi into Russian and by tracing which Navoi texts were available in Pushkin's era.

The comparative typological approach shows that Pushkin's Eastern motifs are not reducible to decorative exoticism. Recent scholarship supports the view that Eastern imagery in Pushkin structures chronotope, enriches lexicon, and carries ethical–ideological meaning [Piavrai, 2023 - p. 367]. When read alongside Navoi's poetic system, three strong typological parallels emerge:

1. Eastern space as an aesthetic–symbolic system;
2. the East as a moral language for humanistic reflection;
3. love as an inner trial linked to freedom and fate.

These parallels clarify how intercultural dialogue can be described through recurring motif functions rather than assuming direct borrowing. In this sense, Navoi helps illuminate the deeper architecture of Pushkin's Eastern texts: the East becomes a way of thinking poetically about the human condition.

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