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**GREEK AND LATIN INFLUENCE ON EDGAR ALLAN  
POE'S POETRY**

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## **Abstract**

The influence of Greek and Latin literature and culture on Edgar Allan's Poe writings has attracted less scholarly interest than his other literary sources of inspiration. My paper aims at discussing Poe's poetry through a detailed analysis of the most relevant Greek and Latin elements in a selection of poems in order to appraise the influence of the classical tradition on the aesthetics of this American author.

**Key words:** Edgar Allan Poe, poetry, Greco-Latin literature, literary influence.

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# **1. Introduction**

## ***1.1. Research justification***

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most important writers in American history. Through his very personal and particular style and choice of literary topics, he became one of the most admired authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Correspondingly, his work was known and appreciated not only in the United States of America, but also beyond their borders (Esplin 199). Because of the early impact of his work, there has been a long series of literary and critic studies aimed to better understand the basis of his literary writings. This research has usually focused on his romantic and contemporary literary sources, but the classic Greek and Latin presence in his writings is an aspect that has received much less scholarly attention.

Therefore, my paper can be useful to shed light on the author's multiple influences and to show that classical sources play a key role on some of his writings.

## ***1.2. Thesis statement and objectives***

As aforementioned, not only romantic and contemporary influences can be considered important for shaping Edgar Allan Poe's poetry, but also other sources such as the Greek and Latin classics. Keeping this in mind, we can fix a thesis statement that will guide the following work: "Edgar Allan Poe's poetry shows an important influence of classical sources, which is particularly clear in some of his major poems."

According to this thesis we can establish the following objectives in order to prove the validity of this thesis:

- Define the classical (Greek and Latin) heritage in a cultural and literary sense.
- Assess the relevance of the classical heritage in Edgar Allan Poe's education and context.

- Identify the presence of classical elements and influence in Poe's poetry.

### **1.3. State-of-the-art**

In order to fulfil the objectives of my paper, there are many secondary sources that can be extremely useful. Firstly, we need to achieve an accurate definition of what to consider as classical heritage in the field of culture and literature, which has been widely studied by many authors and from diverse points of view. However, to define this concept is not the main goal of this paper, but only an operational issue that we need to clarify before studying its influence on Poe's poetry. In that way, we can rely on the deep research done in this field by Vicente Cristóbal González (reflected, for instance, in his article "Tradición Clásica: Concepto y Bibliografía," 2005). This work represents a highly operational tool for my research, since it clarifies what can be included within the category of Classic Tradition, providing us a starting point for further stages of our investigation. In addition to this, Pierre Grimal's *Diccionario de la Mitología Griega y Romana* (1989) has been deemed as essential as it contains a practical reference to many of the classical topics we can find in Poe's poems, which sometimes can result hard to identify without some appropriate guidelines to decipher their meaning.

Once these references are established, a good knowledge about Edgar Allan Poe's life is also necessary, especially about the biographical details concerning his education and his early contact with classic cultural and literary sources. As mentioned above, Poe's figure has been one of the most appreciated, and hence most studied, in American literature. Resultantly, we can find a huge number of studies about his life and literary career. However, three of them seem particularly interesting due their depth and rigor. These three references are the work of Killis Campbell (*The Mind of Poe and Other Studies*, 1962) and Arthur H. Quinn (*Edgar Allan Poe. A Critical Biography*, 1998), and the collection of essays *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* (2002), which contains a complete chronology of Poe's life along with some interesting essays about his aesthetics (e.g., "Poe's Aesthetic Theory", by Rachel Polonsky), motifs (e.g., "Poe's Feminine Ideal", by Karen Weekes", etc.

In these two books we can find abundant information about Poe's life and work, supported by historical documents and other sources, which can provide us a reliable way to approach to Poe's classical education and knowledge.

Finally, another series of secondary sources has been considered in order to help the achievement of our goals. This group of authors is particularly relevant because of their research focus on the main topic of this paper: the Greek and Latin influence on Edgar Allan Poe's Poetry. As we have already highlighted, the main interest of literary researchers around Poe's work has fallen on his gothic, romantic and contemporary influences. However, in the last decades, some other studies have attempted to pay attention to our field of interest, which has been traditionally left aside. In such way, these contributions may become extremely useful for our work since they can provide several instances in order to reveal the presence of classic elements (or, at least, Poe's interest in them) throughout the writer's work.

Inside this group of studies about classic influence on Poe's work, we can differentiate two groups. The first one would comprise some more loose studies that account for Poe's general interest for classic themes, like those of Darlene Harbour Unrue ("Edgar Allan Poe: The Romantic as Classicist", 1995) or Ana González-Rivas Fernández ("Edgar Allan Poe: Latinista", 2011). The second group to consider consists of a series of more specific studies, focused on several Poe's writings. Although most of them study Poe's short fiction, they can be considered as useful ways to understand the author's use of classic elements. That being so, these papers can provide a mechanism to identify and understand the employment and meaning of Greek and Latin references in Poe's poetry. Thus, in this group of sources we can cite the contribution of Gianfranca Balestra (2003), which analyses Poe's classical education and the high Greco-Latin flavour of some of his poems despite the fact that he never visited those countries. But, specially, the papers by Dimitrios Tsokanos have resulted very useful for my purposes (for instance "Hellenic Language and Literature in Poe's Horror Short Stories: 'Siope- a Fable' and 'The Sphinx'", 2017) as he focus on the presence of Greek and Latin references in Poe's writings. See the "Works Cited" section for a complete list of his publications that have been used for this paper.

#### **1.4. Methodology**

According to the aforementioned resources, the methodology of this paper will be based upon them in order to clarify the influence of Greek and Latin models in Edgar Allan Poe's poetry.

With this aim in mind, a general approach to Poe's life and education will be made so that we can better understand the models and ideas he could have had access to. In this manner, this first step will be focused on the texts' context, which will provide a useful tool for further analysis of them (as we will discuss later).

Once a general background of the author is provided, a detailed analysis on the textual level will be carried out. Hence, we will examine Poe's poetry in order to reveal the presence of Greek and Latin elements (such as characters, references, aesthetic themes, etc.) within their lines. As we can see, this will require a careful study of each text, so that we can highlight the most important elements of them. As a result, the corpus of texts that has been selected for the analysis has been limited, according to the scope of this work. Trying to analyse all Poe's writings would be an extremely demanding task, while choosing only one poem would result in quite poor outputs. On that account, it seems that his corpus of poetry can be an appropriate subject of study for this kind of research.

Here, it must be pointed that the analysis of the classical elements in Poe's poetry will not be limited to a formal approach. On the contrary, our main interest in this work is to apprehend the meaning and expressiveness that these devices confer to the whole poem. Accordingly, the elements identified in every poem will be discussed in the light of Poe's personal and literary background (this justifies the general approach to his life and career that we mentioned before). The studies of some authors about other Poe's writings (described in the "state-of-the-art" section) will be very interesting and useful for this stage of analysis too. Hence, their interpretations will be taken into account in order to better understand Poe's use of Greek and Latin sources.

Finally, and taking all the previous steps into account, we will try to achieve some conclusions about the thesis stated for our work. In this sense,



the main features observed during the previous stages of the work will be synthesised and highlighted, but also some other aspects of interest, such as difficulties found during the process of research, aspects that could be improved through further analysis, or possible lines of future research (concerning the topic of this paper or some others related to it).

## **2. Poe's classical background**

The purpose of this piece of research is not to make a complete and exhaustive list of all the contacts that Edgar Allan Poe could have had with Greek and Latin sources throughout his life, which is a task beyond the scope of my paper. However, it is possible here to make a brief review of Poe's educational background according to his biographical data. This information, together with the characteristics of the educational programs of his time, will allow us to establish Poe's contact with Greek and Latin traditions while in formal educational contexts. Nevertheless, although it is also impossible to know all his readings out of those educational contexts, it is possible to deduce some of them from the references and quotes he used in some of his writings.

If we start by revisiting the different institutions that Poe went across as a student, there are solid proofs in his biography of an important contact with Greek and Latin classical cultures, despite his lack of a complete university education. Firstly, we know that Poe attended William Ewing's school where he studied Greek and Latin (Stamos 123). Later, he also attended the Manor House School in Stoke Newington (north to London) from 1817 to 1820, while he was in England because of John Allan's professional business. Reverend John Bransby, who was charge of the school, had studied at St John's College in Cambridge, and mastered both Greek and Latin languages (Stamos 124). According to Campbell, he surely taught them to his students and allowed Poe to achieve a good command of the Latin language in the light of his academic outcomes. In fact, he was able at that moment to read and write in that language and to translate several Latin texts into English. An example of his skills can be found in a letter written by John Allan in 1818, where he told that Edgar (who was only nine years old) was able to read in Latin "pretty sharply" (Campbell 7).

After his stay in England, when the Allans returned to the USA, Poe started to attend Joseph H. Clarke's classes. Although there is less information about Poe's progression in this period, some documents and registers from Clarke's school show that translations of Homer, Horace and Cicero were part of its study program in that moment (Quinn 83). In consequence, Poe must

have also continued his instruction in the classical languages, texts and culture and must have acquired a deeper conscience of their relevance as cultural referents.

A few years later, in 1826, Poe started to attend the University of Virginia, where Professor George Long taught him in the School of Ancient Languages, as Long himself recognised in the following excerpt:

There were some excellent young men and some of the worst I have ever known. I remember well the names of the both, and I think that I remember the name of Poe, but the remembrance is very feeble. (...) He could not be among the worst, and perhaps not among the best or I should certainly remember him. (Kelly)

In spite of his Professor's feeble remembrance, this fragment reveals the certain fact that Poe followed Long's syllabus in Ancient Languages. It included Greek and Latin grammar, along with the analysis and translation of texts of Thucydides, Horace and Virgil, among other Greek and Latin authors. Long also instructed his students about the numerous cultural and textual references that those classical authors employed, which surely provided him a vast knowledge of all these classical elements. Furthermore, the library records of the University show that Poe borrowed some books, such as Charles Rollin's *Histoire Ancienne*, which prove his interest in these elements and which were likely to contribute to widen his classical background.

Unfortunately, Poe was forced to leave the University of Virginia only after eight months, partly because of financial problems, as Cuning relates, and partly due to his own personality and some other personal issues. Thusly, his formal studies of the Greek and Latin classics were abruptly interrupted. Although he attended some classes at the Boston Harbor after he enlisted the army in 1827, its syllabuses were highly unlikely to include ancient languages or texts.

As a consequence, Poe's contact with Greek and Latin references after his university life was probably reduced to the set of readings he made on his own, which is almost impossible to determine. However, we can have an idea of

the importance of these references by taking into account many of his quotations and commentaries throughout several kinds of writings.

Firstly, we can look at Poe's quotations, which may give us an idea of his knowledge of the classical sources. In this manner, he employs several Latin cites in his writings which are, actually, quite accurate, despite some mistakes in his use of quotations. One of them is the sentence that Poe attributes to Seneca several times:

“Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio” (“Nothing is more hateful to wisdom than excessive cunning”). Edgar Allan Poe used this Latin phrase in 1845 as the motto of the second edition of his tale “The Purloined Letter” (*Tales and Sketches* 2: 974), attributing it to Seneca. He had also previously used it near the end of the 1843 version of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” but omitted it in later texts. (Theodorakis 25)

However, as Barrios and García Jurado point out, there is no Seneca's text that contains this assertion. Moreover, Theodorakis has demonstrated that this cite has been taken from Petrarch.

Regarding this topic, a review by Killis Campbell about Poe's Latin quotations may become very interesting. Thus, even though he found some inaccuracies in Poe's quotations, these inaccuracies were scarce and not more abundant than those that Poe took from English authors, such as Pope. In the light of this fact, Campbell thinks that the scarce inaccuracies in Poe's Latin quotations cannot be attributed to his lack of knowledge about Horace or Virgil (two Latin authors he quoted several times) or about the Latin language itself, but mainly to other reasons. The first of these reasons is Poe's habit of quoting only what he remembered without looking for the exact quotation in the original text, as Tsokanos also reflects when he writes “regardless of his inaccurate claims, Poe did not hesitate in making allusions to Hellenic works he had read” (Tsokanos, “My Baptismal Name” 220). The other main source of inaccuracies could reside in some mistakes introduced by editors. Taking this into consideration, the most important datum we can extract from Campbell's analysis is the total amount of Latin quotations in Poe's writings, which can give us an idea of his previous contact and knowledge of that cultural tradition. In

this way, even though Campbell's review was not exhaustive, he found thirty-one quotations from Horace and Virgil (fifteen from the former and sixteen from the latter).

But, in addition to them, many other references to classical authors can be found throughout his work, both to well-known authors like Plato or Aristotle and more specific ones like Silius Italicus or Athenaeus of Naucratis among others. As Tsokanos establishes:

While reading Poe's narratives, one frequently comes upon references that allude to Classical literature, either Latin or Greek. In fact, there are various cases of the author's plain use of Hellenic and Latin words or epigraphs in his storytelling. For instance, readers encounter an epigraph written entirely in Latin in "Eleonora" whereas in "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" Poe utilizes the ancient Greek language. (Tsokanos, "Hellenic References" 47)

According to this important classical background, it is expectable to find many interesting references in Poe's own literary writings. Because of that, we will analyse in the next section some of Poe's poems in order to reveal the most significant instances of Greek and Latin influence on his poetry.

### 3. Analysis of Greek and Latin influence on Poe's poetry

#### 3.1. "The Raven"

As it is considered the most famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe, it is almost a must to begin this analysis of his poetry with this text, because it can provide a significant and interesting way to approach the Greek and Latin flavour in Poe's writings. In this manner, we can start by pointing out one of the most evident classical references in this poem: the bust of Pallas that appears several times in its lines. Although the bust is referred to in six lines of the poem, two of them are especially interesting as the word 'Pallas' appears explicitly:

"Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door" (41)

"On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door" (104)

The term 'Pallas' is one of the multiple vocatives attributed to the goddess Athena (Pallas Athena), and it is hence a reference to the goddess herself. This reference is not casual at all, but carefully chosen according to several aesthetical and symbolic criteria. The former criteria are related to visual and auditory images, as Poe expressed in "The Philosophy of Composition":

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage (...) and secondly, for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself.

Even though these aesthetical devices are quite evident, for instance, in the expression "pallid bust of Pallas," they are of less interest for this paper. Instead, we can focus on another part of Poe's statements extracted again from "The Philosophy of Composition": "the bust of Pallas being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover." As shown, Poe chose the bust of Pallas according to its symbolism, as goddess Athena was considered the deity of wisdom and reason, and therefore associated with scholarship and knowledge. So, the position of the bust "just above my chamber door" transforms the room into a sort of place of reason, which intertwines a game of meaning with the disturbing presence of the raven. As we can see, that it

coherent with Poe's obliquitous use of symbolism, which was a device of crucial relevance in his writings (Jandaghi and Zohdi 314).

But this association with reason and scholarship is not the only property of this Greek deity that Poe exploits in this poem. On the other hand, Athena's iconography comprises an image that plays an important role in this poem: that of an owl. And this image is precisely subverted by the presence of the raven, which incarnates opposite properties from the owl. The most evident contrast resides in their colour: owls are usually light brown or white, while the raven represents the darkest black. But, even more important, is the symbolic charge of both animals, which has its roots in the classical tradition. Thus, owls are seen as images of wisdom and reason (because of their link to Athena), while ravens were deemed as a birds of ill omen by the Romans already. Therefore, the juxtaposition of Athena and the raven supposes a subversion of the goddess' original presence and meaning, which is coherent with Poe's intention of transforming the "scholarship" of the protagonist into madness and despair.

Nevertheless, the references mentioned above are not the only ones we can find in Poe's most famous poem. For instance, line 71 ("What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore") is rooted in "Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum" (*Aeneid* 3. 658), as Gibert highlights (303). Furthermore, in relation to the game of oppositions mentioned above, Poe also strengthens it with a Latin reference to the origin beyond the grave of the bird, which contrasts, once again, with the immortality and divinity of the bust. The first time this reference appears is in line 47 of the poem, when the protagonist questions the bird about its origin and intentions:

"Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!" (47).

To understand this reference we need to remember that Pluto was the Latin god of the underworld, that is, the afterlife world. This figure, with a similar name, is present in Greek mythology too (*Πλούτων*, Plouton). In Greek cosmogony, a crucial element of the underworld is the Stygian river, which the dead had to go across in order to leave the realm of life. Consequently, the "Plutonian shore" is a clear reference to that idea of the underworld, which is

therefore linked in this line to the figure of the raven. Anyway, this first reference could be considered somewhat problematic because, in relation to the context in this part of the poem, it could have a feeble symbolism and work only as some sort of utterance of surprise or incredulity behind the strange figure of the raven on the bust. However, much later in the poem (near the end, in fact), the same expression is used again, now in a moment when the protagonist does not question the raven about its origin, but orders it to get back there:

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!” (98).

As a result, the poem closes with an emphasis on the raven’s deathly (or at least supernatural) nature, thanks to that classical reference that becomes so expressive in this context.

As we can see, Poe’s use of Greek and Latin references in his most important poem is not something subsidiary, but they constitute central elements of it. By their use, Poe is able to build a rich game of meanings and to give the raven itself some of its most relevant attributes. As a consequence, the influence of classical elements in this poem is not only an aesthetical question or a way to show the author’s scholarship, but a completely intentional device and an inextricable part of its deep structure.

### **3.2. “To Helen”**

Despite its short length, this composition is one of the most interesting for the purpose of this paper. Throughout its three stanzas we can find numerous and diverse references to Latin and especially Greek elements that impregnate the poem with an undoubtable classical flavour. Because of this richness of significant elements, we will study the three stanzas in detail in order not to overlook any of these important proofs of our initial thesis. So, this short poem looks like follows:

Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicéan barks of yore,  
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore  
To his own native shore.



On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece,  
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand,  
The agate lamp within thy hand!  
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which  
Are Holy-land!

The composition opens with the same name it carries in its title: Helen. Although the poem was dedicated to Jane Stanard, Poe uses here this name as an ideal of beauty, which is clearly reinforced by the mythical character of Helen of Troy, whose beauty caused the War of Troy. This reference to Helen of Troy immediately places the reader in contact with the Homeric world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, ideas that grow even stronger in conjunction with most of the references in the first and second stanzas.

In that fashion, right after the name of Helen, Poe uses the element of “those Nicéan barks,” which can be interpreted with two complementary senses. The first one is in relation to Nicaea, a naiad (sprit of the water) with a tortuous relationship with the Greek god Dionysius. According to the Greek myth, Dionysius founded in her honour the city of Nicaea, northwest to Anatolia. But, on the other hand, the term “Nicéan” can also be related to the figure of Nice (or Nike), the personification of victory that often appears with goddess Athena. As a matter of fact, Nice Athena was other of the commonly used epithets utilized in Athens to refer to her.

Hence, the “Nicéan barks” bring several interesting connotations related to the victory of the Greek in the War of Troy, but also to their way back from Troy to Greece. This second connotation is supported by the references to the naiad herself, linked to the water and the sea, and to the geographical environment where the travel took place (the eastern Mediterranean Sea).

Of course, these connotations may seem extremely vague on their own, but the rest of the first stanza reinforces the idea above mentioned: those barks bore someone “To his own native shore,” and they did it “o’er a perfumed sea.” Furthermore, the fourth line provides the clearest reference in the stanza: “The weary, way-worn wanderer,” which is an undoubtable allusion to the character or Ulysses, as he is the best-known “weary wanderer” in the literary history.

Thus, we can easily perceive the Homeric influence on this first stanza of the poem, but it is equally easy to see its continuity in the secondo one. Here, Poe continues the ideas from the first part of the poem with elements such as “desperate seas,” “roam,” or “Naiad airs.” Furthermore, even though the poetical voice speaks here about the beauty of a specific person, reflected in the use of the possessive “Thy”, instead of about the wanderer himself, the Homeric flavour is still very present. For example, another reference is the term “classic face,” in allusion to the ancient period of Greek history. But the most interesting here is the construction “hyacinth hair,” which is typically Homeric. Similarly, Homer used the adjective *hyakinthinós* to describe Odysseus’ locks, which resemble the hyacinth in bloom (Verbart 69). Furthermore, it is very relevant because Poe employs similar devices in other writings. For instance, “In Poe’s story, his narrator uses Homeric epithets to describe Ligeia’s ‘hyacinthine’ and voice that is ‘more than mortal melody’” (Unrue 116).

Up to this point, we have seen that the poem orbits around a series of images from the Homeric universe, which begins with Helen (the cause of the war) and continues with the victory of the Greeks and the way home of Ulysses (“The weary, way-worn wanderer). However, by the end of the second stanza, Poe adopts a viewpoint that is out of this timeline, as he refers to both Greece and Rome from a contemporary point of view (we can see the use of the verb “was,” in past tense). Thusly, the most important point of the two last lines of this stanza resides in the identification with the notion of “home,” simply by juxtaposition, as becomes evident if we take a closer look to these lines:

Thy Naiad airs have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece,  
And the grandeur that was Rome.

In the light of this sentence, the high value of Greece and Rome (or more specifically, their “glory” and “grandeur”) for our civilization (“home”) becomes evident in Poe’s mind. In consequence, these last lines of the second stanza can be interpreted as a recognition of the debt that our culture owes to “the glory” of Greece and “the grandeur” of Rome, to the point that they themselves are the home of the poetic voice (and Poe’s too).

Finally, in the poem’s last stanza, despite the continuity with the previous tone, there is a shift in the thematic line, which turns into a series of similes instead of a continuous reference to the Homeric writings. Nevertheless, this series of ideas is also very interesting to us, because many of them are significant references to Greek and Latin elements. For instance, Poe mentions the “statue-like” appearance of his lover in the window, in association with the classical ideal of beauty that has arrived to us in the form of those marble statues. But apart from that general idea, we can find two much more scholarly references that demonstrate Poe’s deep knowledge of the classical tradition. The first of them is the “agate lamp within thy hand,” which seems a clear reference to the myth of Hero and Leander (the former was locked in a tower and used a lamp to guide her lover, Leander, who swam his way across the sea every night to reach her). The second one is the proper name of “Psyche,” the lover of Cupid, both representing the struggle to overcome the obstacles to love and the its final victory (they finally united in a sacred marriage). Together, these two references are an elaborate reference to the efforts of the poetic voice in order to reach his lover, whose beauty is only comparable to that of an ancient statue.

To sum up, this poem is one of the strongest proofs of Poe’s vast classical background and his ability to use these resources to build scholarly but expressive compositions.

### **3.3. “The Coliseum”**

According to its title, one would expect this poem to be one of the most clearly influenced by Latin tradition, and in fact it is. Other interesting aspect about this poem is that Poe himself considered it as one his best compositions,

which could be a sign of the importance of Latin civilization within the author's imaginary. But the most surprising fact about this poem is that Poe wrote it without having visited the monument in his whole life, even though the final lines of the first stanza (lines 7 to 10) suggest, at least in a literal sense, just the opposite:

I kneel, an altered, and an humble man,  
Amid thy shadows, and so drink within  
My very soul thy grandeur, gloom and glory!

As we read these lines, we imagine a speaker in the middle of the Coliseum ("Amid thy shadows") admiring its "grandeur, gloom and glory." However, Poe never visited Rome or even Italy (Balestra 65), so the inspiration for his words of admiration towards the building could not have its origin in the direct contemplation of the monument, but in Poe's personal admiration for the ideas it represents. In other words, Poe is able to reflect his devotion towards the Greek and Latin cultures in the image of the Coliseum, even though he never saw it himself. This idea grows stronger if we compare the end of the last line of the first stanza ("thy grandeur, gloom and glory") with the above mentioned fragment from "To Helen" ("To the glory that was Greece / And the grandeur that was Rome"). That being so, it is clear that Poe associates the ideas of "glory" and "grandeur" to both Greece and Rome, as memories of a past of prosperity and civilization.

But Poe does not only use this poem as a way to praise the great and glorious past of Rome, despite the impression the second and third stanzas can cause on the reader. This impression can be illustrated with the first lines from the third stanza (lines 17 to 21):

Here, where a hero fell, a column falls!  
Here, where the mimic eagle glared in gold,  
A midnight vigil holds the swarthy bat!  
Here, where the dames of Rome their gilded hair  
Waved to the wind, now wave the reed and thistle!

As we can see, Poe contrasts the former glory of the Roman civilization with the abandonment and the devastation that time and nature have caused to this symbol of the Latin grandeur. Nevertheless, Poe's intention seems to be the opposite: to use this image of ruin as a way to reinforce the strength and endurance of the Latin inheritance, which he does in the two last stanzas of the poem. In fact, the fourth stanza starts with a powerful "But stay!" and continues with an enumeration of all the architectural elements that still stand strong despite the inexorability of time.

But the most relevant stanza for the purpose of this study is the fifth, final and longest one, in which the ruins themselves start talking to describe their moral presence and power. Although the entire stanza is very relevant, we will focus on its final part, from line 37 to the end of the poem:

"We rule the hearts of mightiest men — we rule  
"With a despotic sway all giant minds.  
"We are not impotent — we pallid stones.  
"Not all our power is gone — not all our fame —  
"Not all the magic of our high renown —  
"Not all the wonder that encircles us —  
"Not all the mysteries that in us lie —  
"Not all the memories that hung upon  
"And cling around about us as a garment,  
"Clothing us in a robe of more than glory."

In these lines, Poe gives the voice to the Coliseum itself, which stands for all the ruins of the Roman civilization, as it uses the first-person plural pronoun "we." And the message of this landmark of Latin tradition is not one of oblivion and death, but one of absolute validity. Moreover, these ruins claim to be the symbol of the highest standards of morality in human history ("We rule the hearts of mightiest men — we rule / 'With a despotic sway all giant minds."), and not only in the past, but also today ("We are not impotent — we pallid stones"). Consequently, Poe insists in the final line of the poem on the idea of "glory" once more, making clear the association of this term with the Latin culture and its validity in today's world.

As the analysis of this poem shows, the relationship of Edgar Allan Poe with the classical tradition was one of admiration and veneration. Thus, this text is especially interesting because Poe does not use a series of scholarly references in order to link the poem with Greek and Latin elements (there is only a reference to Memnon, a character from the *Iliad*, but it is just an example of the “grandeur” and the “mightiest men” the poem wants to evoke). On the contrary, he utilizes a very accessible language to praise a civilization that pervades our culture and our imaginary. As a consequence, “The Coliseum” shows that Poe’s interest in Greek and Latin elements was not only related to aesthetical principles, but to historical, political and even moral ones.

### **3.4. “Ulalume”**

In this poem we face a situation very similar to that we met while analysing “The Raven.” This is one of Poe’s most famous poems, and it contains only a few Greek and Latin references, but very important for the play of meanings though the composition. These references consist of the use of three female mythical characters, whose attributes pervade the different elements of the poem: Psyche, Astarte and Diana.

The first of them, Psyche, as we have established when analysing “To Helen,” is a symbol of the struggle towards and objective, and a symbol of the human soul too (both interpretations are, in fact, somehow related). In this poem, these two senses are used by Poe. The association of Psyche with the soul is clearly emphasised in the second stanza (lines 10-12):

Here once, through an alley Titanic,  
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul —  
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.

But the other symbolism of Psyche is also exploited here, as a representation of the struggles that the human soul (the poetic voice’s soul) undergoes. In that way, this personification of the soul speaks “in terror” (line 56) or sobs “in agony” (line 58), until the speaker soothes her:

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,  
And tempted her out of her gloom — (72-73)

Even though this endeavour of the poetic voice to manage the sorrow and despair within his soul is very interesting, it is more relevant for this study the reasons behind these feelings, for it is related to the other two symbolic characters mentioned above. In regards to that issue, in line 37 of the poem Poe mentions “Astarte’s bediamonded crescent,” and in line 39 the poetic voice states that “She is warmer than Dian.” These two figures are clearly connected and contrasted in a game of oppositions that depends on the symbolism of those two deities. Firstly, Astarte was a Phoenician deity that was identified with Aphrodite since the Hellenistic period. Maybe Poe decided to use the Phoenician name instead of the Greek or Latin ones because of its exoticism or its sonority, as we know that he often gave “priority to sonorousness over meaning” (Pahl 9). But, in any case, this goddess was associated to sexuality and fertility. Diana (or “Dian,” as Poe writes in the poem) represented the opposite values: she was a virgin goddess of nature, associated to the Moon but also to chastity (Quinn 533). In this light, the idea that Astarte’s crescent is warmer than Dian gets its whole meaning, and intertwines with the other ideas that interplay throughout the poem. For instance, it is connected to the conflict between the speaker and Psyche, as he feels the attraction of Astarte while she mistrusts her.

Apart from these major references, the poem also contains two other minor elements that we can mention. On the one hand, we can read at the beginning of the second stanza that the speaker roams “through an alley Titanic” (line 10). On the other hand, the poetic voice describes in the seventh stanza how “Its Sybillic splendor is beaming” (in reference to Astarte’s Moon). Both terms, Titanic and Sybillic, are only descriptive words that convey some properties of the associated elements (i.e., the alley and the splendor). Therefore, the first word emphasises the size of the alley and the second points out the mystical nature of the splendor. However, there is an important difference between them: while “titanic” is a relatively common word in everyday English, “sybillic” is a scholarly term that requires a good knowledge of the Greek mythology in order to be deciphered. In particular, the sybils were women with premonitory gifts or oracles and, as a result, the term “sybillic” links the lunar splendor with the mystic and supernatural world.

### 3.5. “Lenore”

This poem presents a lower number of Greek and Latin references, but their interest is worth to devote a section of this paper to them. Two of these references have already been mentioned for previous poems, but we can insist on them to highlight their significance. The first element we can find resides precisely in the title, as the proper name “Lenore” is a derivative from the classic name “Helen,” which reinforces the fascination that her figure caused on Poe. Tsokanos points this idea when he writes “this particular title reveals his inclination to utilize the name Helen and many of its derivatives — “To Helen,” “Lenore” and “Eleonora” (Tsokanos, “To the Glory that Was Greece” 31).

Shortly after the title, the second Greek reference appears. In line 2 we can read “Let the bell toll! — a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river; —,” which is an allusion to the underworld and, hence, to the death of the young and beautiful Lenore. We have already discussed this reference while analysing “The Raven”, so it does not need further commentary here.

In addition to these two references, there are two more elements that are, in fact, very interesting. The first of them is right at the beginning of the third stanza, which starts with a raw word in Latin: “*Peccavimus.*” This word represents the first-person plural perfect active indicative of the verb “to sin,” which can be translated as “we sinned.” Despite the possible poetic value of the loan (which covers the action of sinning with an ancient, ancestral air), it is highly interesting for the objectives of our study as it demonstrate that not only Poe could write Latin, but he also was willing to use it with expressive purposes.

The other interesting element is located near the end of the poem, in its fourth stanza, and consists in the concept of a Paeon, as we can read in line 21: “But waft the angel on her flight with a paeon of old days!” The “paeon” is itself a reminiscence of the Greek culture, which is here reinforced by the complement “of old days.” However, the use of this element is not merely aesthetic or scholarly, but crucial for the poem’s meaning. In order to understand its value we need to take into consideration the cultural charge of the term “paeon,” which is described by Tsokanos,



A Paeon was a song of worship created by the ancient Greeks. It was sung by men while dancing. At first it was sung in the honor of Apollo and, later on, in order to honor several ancient Greek gods. A Paeon was usually sung for the prevention of deceases but it had generally been used in the past as a way to express happiness for a win or to show gratitude to a particular god. Thus, many different kinds of Paeans were created such as the Paeon of war, the Paeon of gratitude, the Paeon of victory etc. The most famous Paean creators were Pindarus, Alkmanas, Bachilides *et al.* The general characteristics of a Paeon were its happy tone (they were sung in every ceremony, except at funerals), its precision and its calm execution. (Tsokanos, "To the Glory that Was Greece" 32)

Resultantly, the choice of a paeon to escort the flight of Lenore's soul is coherent with the feelings of her fiancé. These feelings are the central theme of the poem, as they contrast with the expected mourning because of the death of his love. Instead, he offers a pessimistic and gloomy view of the world, and feels elated that Lenore leaves it behind to reach a better existence in heaven. We can appreciate this tone in lines 20 to 27 of the poem:

Avaunt! tonight my heart is light. No dirge will I upraise,  
But waft the angel on her flight with a paeon of old days!  
Let no bell toll! —lest her sweet soul, amid its hallowed mirth,  
Should catch the note, as it doth float up from the damned Earth.  
To friends above, from fiends below, the indignant ghost is riven —  
From Hell unto a high estate far up within the Heaven —  
From grief and groan to a golden throne beside the King of Heaven.

Consequently, the paeon is, as I said above, a crucial element within this last stanza. Moreover, that was initially considered by Poe as a title for the poem, before changing it finally to "Lenore". So, the centrality of this Greek song in this text provides us, once more, a good example of Poe's knowledge of ancient tradition and his interest in it as a literary source.

But in addition to all these individual elements, this poem also provides an interesting example of the important presence of a classical flavour in Poe's treatment of certain motifs. Particularly, the association of love, death and classical references in this poem can be found in several Poe's writings, as

González-Rivas Fernandez and García Jurado show in their analysis of Poe's "Berenice" and "Ligeia".

### **3.6. Other poems**

The above developed analysis of some of Poe's most important poems has provided us very interesting samples of the influence of Greek and Latin sources on his writings. Nevertheless, there are many more references in his composition that would be worthy to be mentioned in this paper. Accordingly, and regarding their relevance, it is necessary to include some of these proofs of classical influence on Poe's poetry. Thus, in the following lines we will focus on some punctual but interesting uses of Greek and Latin elements in Poe's poem others than the above mentioned.

In "Sonnet — To Zante", the presence of this Ionic island is a reference itself, as this island appear in the *Odyssey*. Furthermore, its name is due to its first coloniser, Zante (or Zakynthos). Zakynthos was the son of the Arcadian chief Dardanos, who was son of Zeus and Electra. But Poe, probably because of a similar sound, associates that name with hyacinth, which strengthen the classical flavour of the poem:

Fair isle, that from the fairest of all flowers,  
Thy gentlest of all gentle names dost take! (1-2)  
(...)  
O hyacinthine isle! O purple Zante! (13)

In "Eulalie — A Song" we can find once more the lunar association with the goddess Astarte, but now her attributes of fertility are explicitly expressed, as "her matron eye" expresses:

Shines, bright and strong,  
Astarté within the sky,  
While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her matron eye — (18-20)

The poem "The Haunted Palace" contains an extremely scholarly element that probably was difficult to understand for many readers, but that shows the high degree of knowledge that Poe had about Greek language and

culture. If we look at an excerpt of the poem (which comprises lines 21 to 24), we find that element in line 22.

Round about a throne, where, sitting  
Porphyrogene!  
In state his glory well-befitting,  
The ruler of the realm was seen. (21-24)

The term *porphyrogene* is a Greek compound that means “born into the purple,” which was an allusion to the royal origin of someone since the classical period. For instance, this epithet was applied to Emperor Constantine VII (Constantine *Porphyrogenitus*), and Poe uses it here with exactly the same meaning.

“Dream-Land” is another good example of Poe’s use of scholarly elements. Besides the presence of ‘Titan’ as an adjective (“Titan woods”), in line 11 that was already mentioned for “Ulalume”, there are two more terms that prove Poe’s deep knowledge of classical tradition: Eidolon and Thule. Furthermore, these two terms play a central role in the poem, as they appear in the same six lines that open and close the poem:

BY a route obscure and lonely,  
Haunted by ill angels only,  
Where an Eidolon, named NIGHT,  
On a black throne reigns upright,  
I have reached these lands but newly  
From an ultimate dim Thule — (1-6)

An eidolon was a ghostly figure of a living or dead person in ancient Greek (it appears in Homer’s writings, for instance), which is coherent with the “haunted” atmosphere that encompasses the excerpt. On its turn, “Thule” is a term used by ancient Greek historians and geographers to refer to a region in northern Europe (but its precise location is not clear). Subsequently, that Thule was perceived by the Greeks as a cold, remote and inaccessible place, which is exactly the meaning that Poe uses here in combination with “ultimate dim.”

In "A Valentine", even though its theme is not classical, we find Greek references too. The first one is in line 2, where Poe compares the "luminous eyes" of the recipient of poem with "the twins of Loeda." These twins are the brothers Castor and Pollux (sons of Loeda), who were transformed into the Gemini constellation by Zeus. In fact, the brightest stars of this constellation receive the names of Castor and Pollux, which justifies Poe's comparison in the poem. The author may have known the names of the stars, but the use of the appellation "twins of Loeda" also requires the knowledge of the myth that explains the relationship between both terms.

The second element in that poem is the "Gordian knot" that appears in line 10 ("And yet there is in this no Gordian knot"). That concept refers to the legend of the ancient Phrygian king Gordias, whose chariot was dedicated to Zeus and fastened to a post with such an intricate knot that no one was able to disentangle it. Only Alexander the great did it by cutting it down with his sword. On this wise, the expression is a highly scholarly metaphor (which Poe obviously knew well) for a problem almost impossible to solve.

"Sonnet — To Science" is another interesting example not only because of its classical elements, but because Poe uses them to reflect his ambiguous position towards science. In this fashion, we can see a proof of Poe's "remarkable interest in science" (Miquel-Baldellou 136) in the poem's first line, which contains the recognition of the ancient origin of science ("Science! True daughter of Old time thou art"). It could be a reference to the Greek philosophers and scientists, who were pioneers in the scientific study of nature. However, the reference is too vague for us to be sure about it. But the most interesting part of the poem is the opposition that Poe establishes between the magical, mythical conceptions of tradition and the new approaches of science (the latter destroying the former). For that reason, the author uses mythological figures to build his reproach to science:

Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?  
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood  
To seek a shelter in some happier star?  
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood, (9-12)

As we can see, Poe employs these references to describe, in a very expressive way, how science has eliminated the mythical aura of the Moon (Diana), or the spirits from the woods (Hamadryad) and the streams (Naiad).

On the other hand, “Epigram for Wall Street” is an example of direct literary influence. The epigrammatic literary genre was created as we know it (short humoristic poetic compositions) by Latin writers, like Martial or Lucilius. They established the structure of this kind of poems, which began with a short development of a topic and ended with an abrupt shift of tone towards it. That shift was responsible of the humoristic effect and it is precisely what Poe uses in this poem. In that manner, he uses two puns (based on the ambiguous meaning of “in creases” / increases and “double”) to build an epigram in two parts, or two epigrams inside the same poem, as we can appreciate bellow:

I'll tell you a plan for gaining wealth,  
Better than banking, trade or leases —  
Take a bank note and fold it up,  
And then you will find your money in creases!  
This wonderful plan, without danger or loss,  
Keeps your cash in your hands, where nothing can trouble it;  
And every time that you fold it across,  
'Tis as plain as the light of the day that you double it!

And finally, an important degree of Greek and Latin influence can be observed in “Al Aaraaf” too, where the classical references are so numerous that I will only mention some of them, from the name of the most prominent character “Nesace” (of Greek origin), to many other classical allusions such as Emyrean, Zante, Cupid, Therasaeon reign, lanthe, the Parthenon, among others.

This brief list of poems and influences is necessarily incomplete. However, the previous analysis of some of Poe's most important poems and this collection of short but relevant samples are more than enough to have an accurate perception of the Greek and Latin influence in Poe's poetry.

## 4. Conclusions

Traditionally, the Romantic and Gothic influences have been the predominant issue in the literary study of the figure of Edgar Allan Poe. However, the purpose established at the beginning of this paper was to show that Greek and Latin traditions also play a very important role in Poe's writings.

To accomplish that objective, this research has focused on some relevant facts of the author's life and career along with an analysis of his literary production. Firstly, we have revisited the most important landmarks in Poe's educational biography in order to explore his previous contact with the classical tradition. In this regard, it has been proven that Poe's classical background was solidly constructed through years of study of the Greek and Latin languages, literatures and cultures.

But the most important part of this paper is the research of Poe's use of that background in his literary writings or, in other words, the translation of his knowledge into tangible literary influences. As a review of all his writings would be a titanic task much beyond the scope of this paper, that research has been limited to Poe's poetry, as a significant sample of his literary work.

In that way, this research has focused on looking for Greek and Latin elements (references, characters, motifs, etc.) in some of Poe's most important poems, which has provided interesting results in relation to the initial thesis of this paper. For instance, there are references to the goddess Athena (Pallas Athena) or to the classical notion of the underworld in "The Raven." "To Helen" shows a clear Homeric atmosphere with very significant allusions to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, along with other classical elements such as the aesthetics (statues) or the myths of Psyche and Hero and Leander. In "The Coliseum", Poe's praises the grandeur of Rome and the endurance of its values, which are still present and rule the greatest men in the world. Different classical female characters are used in "Ulalume" to build a game of contrasts between different meanings of womanhood and the passions of the soul. And finally, Poe utilizes the symbol of the Stygian river and some ancient Greek rituals (more

specifically, the concept of paean) to confront ideas about death, mourning and the gloomy nature of the world in “Lenore”.

In addition to this main analysis, we have also undertaken a briefer tour through some other poems in order to emphasise other samples of Greek and Latin influence in Poe’s poetry. As a result, even though this list is not exhaustive, we have also found very relevant instances of classical elements, references or genres in “Sonnet — To Zante”, “Eulalie — A Song”, “The Haunted Palace”, “Dream-Land”, “A Valentine”, “Sonnet — To Science”, “Al Aaraaf” or “Epigram for Wall Street”.

Consequently, through the previous pages we have confirmed that Edgar Allan Poe had a very good education in ancient culture and Greek and Latin languages. Furthermore, it has turned evident that this contact with the classical world provided him a great series of tools he consciously used later in his poems with both aesthetical and expressive purposes. Therefore, the previous analysis has confirmed the initial thesis of this paper. Edgar Allan Poe’s poetry certainly shows an important influence of Greek and Latin sources, which is particularly evident not only in some of his major poems but also in a great part of his poetic production.

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