

POE AND THE
PRINTED WORD

KEVIN J. HAYES



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CHAPTER I

The student and the book

I loitered away my boyhood in books, and dissipated my youth
in reverie . . .

“Berenice”

Ellis and Allan, a Richmond, Virginia, import/export firm established by Charles Ellis and John Allan in 1800, became profitable enough during the following decade and a half for the partners to decide to open a London office after the War of 1812 had ended. In 1815, John Allan left Richmond for London, taking with him his family: his wife Frances; her unmarried sister, Ann “Nancy” Valentine, who had long been a member of their household; and Edgar Poe, the young boy John and Frances had unofficially adopted some years before. After spending time in Scotland, they reached London in the first week in October. By month’s end, they had found lodgings in Bloomsbury. Allan wrote home to his business partner, describing his family and their cozy accommodations, depicting himself seated “by a snug fire in a nice little sitting parlour in No. 47 Southampton Row, Russel[] Square where I have procured Lodgings for the present with Frances and Nancy Sewing and Edgar reading a little Story Book.”¹

That young Poe was busy reading is unstartling. John Allan had already recognized the child’s precocity and purchased some books for him before they left the United States.² The books Allan had purchased, schooltexts by the English grammarian Lindley Murray, may have been useful for Poe’s education, yet they would hardly have appealed to him as much as the day’s storybooks. Allan obviously acquired additional volumes for the boy during their first months in Great Britain. The storybook young Poe was reading in late October could have been any one of several recently published chapbooks. He later expressed his familiarity with *Sinbad the Sailor*

and *Jack and the Beanstalk*; new London editions of these two works appeared the year the Allan family came to England.³ So did new editions of *The History of Little King Pippin* and *Tom Thumb*. (In one of his lectures, Poe would praise a “penny edition of Tom Thumb.”⁴) *Mother Goose’s Melody*, a work Poe would mention in “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob,” appeared in a London edition the following year.⁵

Thomas Love Peacock’s *Sir Hornbook, or, Child Launcelot’s Expeditions: A Grammatico-Allegorical Ballad*, which went through two editions in 1815, combined grammar and adventure to create a work with greater appeal for a six-year-old than Murray’s *Grammar*. As the poem begins, Childe Launcelot approaches the castle of Sir Hornbook who joins the young knight and leads him on a series of adventures, encountering such valiant knights and ladies fair as Sir Syntax and his love, Lady Prosody, and culminating at the Muses’ gates where Sir Hornbook leaves the youthful knight:

Childe Launcelot pressed the sacred ground,
With hope’s exulting glow;
Some future song perchance may sound
The wondrous things which there he found,
If you the same would know.⁶

James Pedder’s *The Yellow Shoe-Strings, or, The Good Effects of Obedience to Parents* had appeared in 1814 and had quickly become a popular book among English children or, more precisely, a popular book for British parents to give to their children. Reviewing one of Pedder’s subsequent works, Poe wrote that the author was “well known in England, as the composer of one of the most popular juvenile books of the day, ‘The Yellow Shoe-strings’ – three words familiar in nursery annals. To indite a really good work of this kind is a task often attempted in vain by men of high literary eminence. In truth the qualifications for success depend not a little upon a clear head, but still more upon a warm heart.”⁷ The work’s didactic sentimentalism has doomed it to obscurity since, yet Poe remembered *The Yellow Shoe-Strings* with fondness. His kind words, however, may have been personally motivated. During the 1830s, Pedder moved his family from England to Philadelphia, and Poe developed a close friendship with him and his daughters, Anna and Bessie, who occasionally aided the impoverished Poe family and to whom he inscribed a copy of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1839.⁸

Some literary classics of the previous century were available in

highly abridged versions designed for young readers and illustrated with woodcuts. In 1815, chapbook editions of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe* were published in London, as they had been for many years. Poe later read an unabridged *Robinson Crusoe*, but his first exposure to the work likely came through one of the many chapbook versions. Though John Allan was not much of a literary man, his family would have kept a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. About the book, Poe later remarked, "It has become a household thing in nearly every family in Christendom."⁹ Writing in the editorial first person plural, Poe recalled his childhood memories of the book with great affection: "How fondly do we recur, in memory, to those enchanted days of our boyhood when we first learned to grow serious over Robinson Crusoe! – when we first found the spirit of wild adventure enkindling within us, as, by the dim fire light, we labored out, line by line, the marvellous import of those pages, and hung breathless and trembling with eagerness over their absorbing – over their enchanting interest!"¹⁰ *Robinson Crusoe* fostered Poe's interest in imaginary voyages, an interest other contemporary publications would have perpetuated. The following year, *The Surprising Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, a highly abridged version of Munchausen's *Travels*, appeared as part of the "New Juvenile Library."

During the spring of 1816, Poe entered the London boarding school of the Misses Dubourg. If he had yet to devote much time to Lindley Murray's textbooks, the school would have given him the opportunity. Murray's *English Spelling-Book; With Reading Lessons Adapted to the Capacities of Children* supplemented his education, but it was not the main spelling book the Misses Dubourg used, for John Allan had to purchase a copy of William Fordyce Mavor's *The English Spelling Book, Accompanied by a Progressive Series of Easy and Familiar Lessons* after Edgar had entered the school. Murray's *The English Reader: Or, Pieces in Prose and Poetry, Selected from the Best Writers*, a work that had gone through numerous editions since its original publication in 1799, introduced Poe to many British belletristic writers. The work was broken down into two parts, prose and verse, and each part was subdivided into separate chapters devoted to different types of writing – narrative, didactic, argumentative, descriptive. The prose section of the book contained quotations from Joseph Addison, Hugh Blair, Oliver Goldsmith, David Hume, and Samuel Johnson, among many others. The poetry section provided generous

excerpts from the work of Mark Akenside, William Cowper, John Milton, Alexander Pope, James Thomson, and Edward Young.

While there is no way to know precisely how much attention Poe gave these textbooks during his early years in England, his later writings reveal his familiarity with Murray's works, which would become a kind of touchstone in Poe's criticism. *The English Grammar*, Murray's most well-known schooltext, figures prominently in his review of Theodore S. Fay's *Norman Leslie*. In the review, Poe quibbled with Fay's and, indirectly, with Nathaniel P. Willis's grammar: "As regards Mr. Fay's *style*, it is unworthy of a school-boy. The 'Editor of the New York Mirror' has either never seen an edition of Murray's Grammar, or he has been a-Willising so long as to have forgotten his vernacular language." Poe pointed out several grammatical errors and concluded: "There is not a single page of Norman Leslie in which even a schoolboy would fail to detect at least two or three gross errors in Grammar, and some two or three most egregious sins against common-sense."¹¹ Another amusing reference to Murray came in a footnote to a poem of Murray's reprinted in the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Poe called Murray "that celebrated grammarian" but ended his footnote with the comment, "It is somewhat remarkable that the present lines involve an odd *grammatical* error of construction in the concluding stanza."¹²

The ease and confidence with which Poe noticed grammatical errors in others' works suggests that he paid close attention to his early schoolbooks. Reviewing Hugh A. Pue's *Grammar of the English Language, in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Every American Youth*, Poe found numerous grammatical errors and concluded that "whether Mr. P.'s queer little book shall or shall not meet the views of 'Every American Youth,' will depend pretty much upon another question of high moment – whether 'Every American Youth' be or be not as great a nincompoop as Mr. Pue."¹³ While a good grammarian, Poe nevertheless bristled at the kind of regimentation grammatical rules imposed. In his "Fifty Suggestions," written near the end of his life, he wrote, "Let the noblest poet add to his other excellences – if he dares – that of faultless versification and scrupulous attention to grammar. He is damned at once. His rivals have it in their power to discourse of 'A. the true poet, and B. the versifier and disciple of Lindley Murray.'"¹⁴

Young Poe was introduced to the fundamentals of the Anglican Church at the Dubourg school, too. A *Book of Common Prayer* and a

copy of John Lewis's *The Church Catechism Explained by Way of Question and Answer*, a work which had been in use for over a century, were among other expenses John Allan paid to the Dubourgs at the time.¹⁵ Beyond its religious value, the *Book of Common Prayer* would have impressed Poe with the elegance of the English language. Most of the selections in Murray's *English Reader* came from the Augustan Age, but the prose of the Anglican prayer book, with its formal diction and long periods, hearkened back to the Elizabethan.

Poe also studied history and geography with the Dubourgs. He learned geography reading Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy's *Geography for Children: Or A Short and Easy Method of Teaching and Learning Geography*, a text in use since the 1730s, and he studied history with Christopher Irving's *A Catechism of the History of England*. Back in the United States, schoolchildren Poe's age were reading native history and geography texts written from highly nationalistic points of view. Unlike so many other Americans who grew up during and just after the War of 1812, Poe expressed little political animosity toward Great Britain. Far from it. His critical writings sometimes encouraged rapprochement between the two countries. Reviewing John Armstrong's *Notices of the War of 1812*, he wrote, "We are grieved . . . to see, even in the opening passages of the work, a piquancy and freedom of expression, in regard to the unhappy sources of animosity between America and the parent land, which can neither to-day nor hereafter answer any possible good end, and may prove an individual grain in a future mountain of mischief."¹⁶ The dearth of American themes and characters in Poe's writings, aspects that have helped his works rise above the jingoistic breast-beating of his contemporaries, can be attributed partially to the cosmopolitan education he received from the Misses Dubourg.

Sometime in late 1817 or early 1818, Poe left the Dubourg school and began attending the Manor House School, Stoke Newington, about four miles from London. The school and its overseer, the Reverend John Bransby, would receive fictional treatment in Poe's "William Wilson." Most of the schoolbooks were the common property of the Manor House School and passed from one student to the next – if Poe's description in "William Wilson" can be believed: "Interspersed about the room, crossing and recrossing in endless irregularity, were innumerable benches and desks, black, ancient, and time-worn, piled desperately with much-bethumbed books."¹⁷ Here, if not before, Poe began learning Latin. On 22 June, 1818,

John Allan wrote to a correspondent, “Edgar is a fine Boy and reads Latin pretty sharply.”¹⁸ A good Latin education begins with *Aesop’s Fables*, and a copy of *Aesopi Fabulae* formerly in Poe’s possession survived into the twentieth century.¹⁹ The Reverend Bransby also exposed his students to British *belles lettres* and Latin verse. Another pupil remembered him as a “thorough scholar” who was “very apt at quotation, especially from Shakespeare and Horace.”²⁰ Poe also continued his study of English history with John Bigland’s *Letters on English History, for the Use of Schools* and may have read Bigland’s other textbooks treating geography, European history, and natural history.²¹

John Allan was proud of his young foster son’s scholarly prowess and often wrote to his uncle William Galt from London to tell him so. In three letters written during a four-month period which included Poe’s eleventh birthday, Allan wrote that Edgar “enjoys a good reputation and is both able and willing to receive instruction”; “is a verry fine Boy and a good Scholar”; and “by his own exertions he has repaired many Gaps [in his education] both in general literature and the Sciences.”²² The books young Poe read at Stoke Newington would prepare him for the fine classical education he would receive upon his return to Virginia.

The London office of Allan and Ellis (John Allan had transposed the names in England) proved unsuccessful, so the Allan family returned to Richmond in the summer of 1820. Later that year, Poe began studying with Joseph H. Clarke, a schoolmaster who had recently relocated from Baltimore. In the advertisements for his Richmond school, Clarke stated that he taught the classical languages, writing, arithmetic, bookkeeping, geometry, trigonometry, navigation, surveying, gunnery, optics, astronomy, conic sections, algebra, mechanics, and geography, among many other subjects. Though the list seems hyperbolic, other evidence verifies that he provided his students with a broad education. Clarke, who lived into his tenth decade, recalled Poe reading “Ovid, Caesar, Virgil, Cicero, and Horace in Latin, and Xenophon and Homer in Greek.”²³ Though supplying several names, this recollection actually reveals little, for the works of these authors formed the core of any good classical education. John Allan’s account books show that he paid Clarke for a copy of *De officiis*, Cicero’s ethical treatise written as advice to a son, and an expensive edition of Horace’s works.²⁴ Besides *De officiis*,

Poe read several of Cicero's orations, knowledge of which was required for admission to the day's universities.²⁵ Ciceronian rhetoric, Marshall McLuhan has argued, significantly influenced Poe's outlook as well as his discursive style.²⁶

Clarke also remembered Poe writing verse at the time, so the boy's interest in Horace is understandable. Schoolmate John T. L. Preston recalled Poe's enthusiasm: "He was very fond of the Odes of Horace, and repeated them so often in my hearing that I learned by sound the words of many, before I understood their meaning."²⁷ When his schoolbooks did not occupy his time, Poe read the important British belletristic writers. Lord Byron was an early favorite, and he admitted having modelled his youthful verse on Byron's. At this time he likely read such other modern British poets as Samuel T. Coleridge, Thomas Moore, and Percy Bysshe Shelley and such essayists as William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Charles Lamb. Poe also recalled reading Washington Irving in his youth.²⁸ *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* had appeared in parts in 1819 and 1820; from then, complete editions were steadily available.

Poe spent three years at the school, but when Clarke left Richmond to return to Baltimore in 1823, his pupils transferred to William Burke's school. Like Clarke, Burke was a good classicist. Since he had already published a pamphlet, *Prosody of the Latin Language* (Richmond, 1816), Latin-versifying would have occupied a prominent place in Burke's teaching. Poe himself later admitted, "I have made prosody, in all languages which I have studied, a particular subject of inquiry."²⁹ Poe's extensive discussion of prosody, "The Rationale of Verse," may owe a modest debt to Burke. Later, Burke would publish a basic Latin textbook. The work would appear too late for Poe to use, but it provides a good indication of Burke's teaching approach. Since Burke based his textbook on Thomas Ruddiman's *Rudiments of the Latin Tongue*, a work generations of young Latin scholars had been using since the 1750s, Burke presumably taught from Ruddiman when Poe was his student.

There was little that Poe could learn from Burke that he had not already learned from Joseph Clarke, however. The reminiscence of Andrew Johnston, a fellow student at Burke's school, bears this out: "Poe was a much more advanced scholar than any of us; but there was no other class for him – that being the highest – and he had nothing to do, or but little, to keep his headship of the class. I dare say he liked it well, for he was fond of desultory reading, and even

then wrote verses.³⁰ The relationship between Poe and the world of books Johnston described aptly conveys the attitude toward print culture Poe had formed during his childhood and adolescence. On one hand, books provided systems of knowledge, ways of organizing the world into knowable facts; on the other hand, books freed the imagination, allowing the reader to journey backward to antiquity and forward into the imaginary future. Young Poe may not have articulated himself precisely in these terms, but, as he read Byron while his classmates were reading Ruddiman's *Rudiments*, he understood how the printed word could free as well as constrict the mind.

After opening its doors the year before, the University of Virginia began its second session on 1 February, 1826. The young man destined to become the most famous student matriculating that session had yet to reach Charlottesville, however. Poe did not arrive until mid-February at which time he registered for classes, signing up for Professor George Long's Ancient Languages and Professor George Blaetterman's Modern Languages. Most students took three courses, but, according to Poe, John Allan had not provided him with enough money to afford the tuition for a third class, which would have been mathematics. Nor did Poe have enough money to purchase the textbooks he needed. A week after he had arrived, he wrote home "for some more money, and for books." He continued to write home for more books as needed, including a copy of Tacitus' *Historiae*. Other necessary textbooks Poe purchased locally, buying them on credit at usurious rates.³¹

Outside the University, there were a few places students could go to get books. Retail shops selling general goods stocked some basic school texts: Cicero, Homer, Livy. They also stocked recent novels and other contemporary belletristic works. Jones's bookstore was not far from campus. Since Poe could scarcely afford necessary textbooks, it seems unlikely he made many book purchases beyond the essential, but Jones, if his establishment were anything like other contemporary American bookshops, ran an informal circulating library. Here Poe may have found many books published the year he entered the University, several of which he came to know, including James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*; Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey*, a work which Poe would spoof in "King Pest";³² and Timothy Flint's *Recollections of the Last Ten Years Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi*.

One of Poe's acquaintances recalled a local harnessmaker named Hermann Tucker who became successful enough at his trade to be able to expand his retail business into "a sort of curio store filled with second-hand articles." During Poe's time, Tucker's stock included books from a library "which had fallen under the auctioneer's hammer in order to satisfy a plantation debt."³³ According to the recollection, Poe became especially fond of a copy of Hogarth's prints from the library. That Hogarth appealed to Poe is unsurprising – George Bernard Shaw would associate the two.³⁴ Hogarth's depictions of London streetlife, with all its earthy detail, would have jived with the memories of anyone who spent their childhood there. Since Poe later devoted much thought to printed illustrations when he imagined his ideal magazine, his early attention to Hogarth takes on further significance. Like that of any Virginia plantation owner, the collection Tucker acquired would also have included many historical works and a wide variety of *belles lettres* including the *Spectator*, Chesterfield's *Letters*, Charles Johnstone's *Adventure of a Guinea*, and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, to name a few possibilities among the numerous eighteenth-century belletristic works Poe came to know.³⁵

Of all his sources for books, Poe's fellow classmates were his likeliest. Since he had no qualms about borrowing money from other students, it seems unlikely Poe would have refrained from borrowing books from them. Few commodities are easier to borrow (or more difficult to return) than books.³⁶ Among a group of generally intelligent and well-to-do young men, Poe had the opportunity to talk about literature and exchange ideas with others, the kind of experience John Allan had seldom encouraged. Poe joined the Jefferson Literary Society and became its secretary. Members discussed what books they had read, made recommendations for reading, and shared writings of their own composition.

The attitudes expressed by members of the Jefferson Literary Society are not difficult to guess. Among the various literary genres, the most well respected were poetry and history. Though some eighteenth-century fiction writers had achieved considerable respect – Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, Tobias Smollett – fiction, by and large, still held a second-class status as a literary genre. Thomas Jefferson made no place for it in his organizational scheme for the University's library.³⁷ Writing histories or other non-fiction works was much more highly regarded than fiction-writing. Members of an

early nineteenth-century literary society could talk seriously about poetry or history-writing but seldom about novels. Sir Walter Scott, of course, was the major exception among contemporary writers of fiction, but his works were better labelled historical romances than novels. The example of Scott suggested that the only way to make fiction-writing respectable was to steep it in history.

Thomas Goode Tucker, a fellow student, remembered Poe voicing his opinions about literature multiple times. On one occasion, Poe read a lengthy story he had written only to have it laughed down by his friends. He became so incensed that he flung the manuscript into the fire.³⁸ Tucker further recalled that Poe was “fond of quoting poetic authors and reading poetic productions of his own” and also that he and Poe read the histories of David Hume and John Lingard while at the University of Virginia.³⁹

The first three volumes of Lingard’s *History of England* appeared in 1819, and additional volumes were published during the 1820s. Lingard’s was the first serious, scholarly history of England to appear since Hume’s *History of England*. Though Hume’s work had achieved status as a literary classic by Poe’s day, it was by no means unassailable, and Lingard had set out, unostentatiously and inoffensively, to refute Hume historical era by historical era.⁴⁰ Discussing Hume and Lingard during the first half of 1826, Poe and Tucker were absolutely *outré*, for the contemporary British quarterlies were also discussing the relative merits of the two historians. Both the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* attacked Lingard. Robert Southey, who wrote the *Quarterly Review* article, censured Lingard’s treatment of the Reformation. Reading and discussing the two historians, Poe and Tucker kept themselves abreast of one of the day’s important literary controversies. Though the quarterlies squabbled over religious issues, Poe may have noticed another key difference between the two works. Lingard’s was a political history while Hume had made literary history a part of England’s general history, the first important historian to do so.

While comparing Hume with Lingard was in vogue, Hume had long been compared to fellow Scottish historian, William Robertson. Such comparisons appeared in both the British and the American periodicals of Poe’s day. A contributor to Joseph Dennie’s *Port Folio* concluded that Hume “is often loose and careless in construction; and though he is unquestionably a graceful and an elegant writer, and, perhaps, unrivalled in the clearness and fluency of his narrative;

yet in dignity, in strength, in harmony and in purity, he is surpassed by Robertson, who in his *History of Scotland*, his first and, in our opinion, his happiest production, has exhibited a model of English composition superior to the style of any of his countrymen."⁴¹ Another contributor to the same journal some years later made quite the opposite conclusion: "The general superiority of Hume over his rival is settled into a tranquil undisturbed sentiment, without any detraction from the genius and talents of Robertson."⁴²

Comparisons between the two were usually between Hume's *History of England* and Robertson's *History of Scotland*, but Robertson was better known in the United States for his *History of America*, a work Poe borrowed from the University of Virginia library in August.⁴³ Poe withdrew other historical works from the library around the same time. William Wertenbaker, fellow student and then librarian, later recalled Poe perusing the collection "in search of old French books, principally histories."⁴⁴ In June, Poe borrowed three volumes of Charles Rollin's *Histoire ancienne* which treated early Egyptian, Carthaginian, Persian, and Grecian civilizations. Later in the summer, he borrowed two volumes of Rollin's *Histoire romaine*, both of which treated Caesar's Gallic Wars and the last years of the Roman Republic.⁴⁵ Near the end of August, he borrowed the first two volumes of John Marshall's *Life of George Washington*. Though nominally a biography, Marshall's narrative starts well before Washington's birth. The entire first volume, in fact, is a history of early America *before* Washington. Borrowing the earlier volumes of Marshall and not the later ones, Poe revealed his interest as American history in general, not necessarily the life of Washington.

Of all these various histories, only Rollin's directly concerned his schoolwork. Professor Long likely assigned Rollin for supplementary study. Sharing his attitude with Thomas Jefferson, Long firmly believed that the history and geography of a people should be studied with its language.⁴⁶ Reading the two works by Rollin, Poe not only learned about classical history, he also practiced reading French. The other histories he read, however, were written in English and treated either Great Britain or North America. The evidence suggests that Poe was not merely or even primarily studying history. Rather, he appears more interested in *history-writing*. The anecdotes left by Poe's fellow students agree that he had already begun to express his literary ambitions by writing poetry and critiquing the work of established writers. Might Poe's literary

aspirations have allowed him to consider a career as a historian? “The perfect composition, the nervous language, the well-turned periods of Dr. Robertson inflamed me to the ambitious hope that I might one day tread in his footsteps: the calm philosophy, the careless inimitable beauties, of his friend and rival [Hume], often forced me to close the volume with a mixed sensation of delight and despair.” The words are Gibbon’s, as quoted in the *Port Folio*, but they might just as easily apply to any young man engaged in reading the finest literature of an earlier generation and wondering, with good reason, whether his literary ambition and talent could carry him to such heights.⁴⁷ Poe’s unfulfilled desire to write a critical history of American literature can be traced back to his history reading at the University of Virginia.

By the third week of September, Poe had learned that he would be examined in both Ancient and Modern Languages during the last two weeks of the term. “The whole college has been put in great consternation by the prospect of an examination,” he wrote to John Allan – “There is to be a general one on the first of December, which will occupy the time of the students till the fifteenth – the time for breaking up.” Poe expressed the unfairness of those, like himself, who had been at school for only one session having to be examined with the second-year students, but resigned himself to the testing system and told Allan in the same letter, “I have been studying a great deal in order to be prepared, and dare say I shall come off as well as the rest of them.”⁴⁸

Also in the same letter, Poe boasted about the University of Virginia’s excellent library, which had recently been moved from its temporary location to the Rotunda: “They have nearly finished the Rotunda – The pillars of the Portico are completed and it greatly improves the appearance of the whole – The books are removed into the library – and we have a very fine collection.”⁴⁹ Poe would use the collection to further his study of French. In the first week of November, he withdrew both volumes of Nicolas Gouin Dufief’s *Nature Displayed in Her Mode of Teaching Language to Man*.⁵⁰ His use of Dufief validates his statement to Allan that he was studying for his examination, but the work also reveals Poe’s rebellion against his French teacher. Professor Blaetterman’s European training gave him a traditional approach to teaching languages which was firmly grounded in the teaching of grammar. Dufief’s approach to learning

and teaching languages differed significantly from traditional pedagogy. Blaetterman was not responsible for the library's copy of Dufief. Like nearly all of the books then in the library, it had been placed there by the University's founder, Thomas Jefferson. Besides his pedagogical activities, Dufief sold books for a living, and Jefferson had frequented his Philadelphia shop. Dufief's work held special meaning for Jefferson, for, during his presidency, Jefferson had encouraged him to write it: "You will render a good service if you can abridge the acquisition of a new language."⁵¹

Essentially, Dufief applied Romanticism to pedagogy. Instead of learning grammatical rules, students of Dufief learned French according to Nature, that is, the same way a native speaker learns French as a child growing up. Dufief emphasized the importance of rote memorization of basic words and phrases. Much of the first volume of *Nature Displayed* is taken up by lists of nouns, grouped and ordered in much the same way a child growing up would first encounter such words. The first section contains nouns relating to such basic human needs as food, clothing, and shelter. Each noun is listed with a complete sentence using the word and a corresponding English translation of the word and the sentence. Subsequent lists of nouns expand the reader's spatial universe. The second section lists nouns describing urban surroundings. The third section includes words describing travel and the countryside; and the fourth section describes other countries and even other planets. Additional sections in the first volume treat pronouns, articles, adjectives, and adverbs. Dufief does not treat verb conjugation and syntax until well into the second volume.

By the time Poe read the work, Dufief's method had achieved a fair degree of acceptance in both the United States and England. First published in 1804, it went through its third edition in 1810. The following year, a Spanish textbook following Dufief's method was published at Philadelphia. Both the French and Spanish versions were reprinted in London that decade. Despite growing acceptance, Dufief's method had not influenced European methods of teaching language. When Poe borrowed the University of Virginia's copy of the fourth edition of *Nature Displayed* (1821), he challenged his teacher's pedagogical approach. Later remarks confirm Poe's commitment to the kind of approach Dufief recommended. Advising Frederick W. Thomas, one of his most loyal and sympathetic correspondents, how to study French, Poe wrote, "The best advice I

can give you, under the circumstances, is to busy yourself with the theory or grammar of the language as little as possible and to read *side-by-side* translations continually, of which there are many to be found. I mean French books in which the literal English version is annexed page per page.”⁵² Fénelon’s *Les aventures de Télémaque*, which Poe would later mention among important works of didactic fiction, had been the most popular French book in early America and remained so in Poe’s day.⁵³ Elizabeth Ellis, daughter of John Allan’s business partner, boasted about learning the work by heart.⁵⁴ Parallel English and French texts of *Les aventures de Télémaque* were widely available. In a follow-up letter to Thomas, Poe reinforced his earlier advice: “As regards the French – get into a French family by all means – read much, write more, and give grammar to the dogs.”⁵⁵

Poe may also have made a kind of parallel text for himself to facilitate his study of French at the University. Shortly after arriving, he had John Allan send him a copy of Alain René Le Sage’s *History and Adventures of Gil Blas*, probably Tobias Smollett’s English translation. Allan sent the volume begrudgingly, thinking that Poe was wasting time reading such frivolities, but Poe may have had more pragmatic reasons for rereading *Gil Blas*. Though he would later disparage the work’s episodic quality, Poe had read *Gil Blas* in his youth, and his youthful impressions of the book’s robbers and their secret cavern long occupied a place in his memory.⁵⁶ With the familiar English text nearby, Poe could have reread *Gil Blas* in French easily. What John Allan took for frivolity may have been another instance of Poe’s scholarly devotion.

On 15 December, the University of Virginia faculty met. Professor Blaetterman reported Poe’s name among the students “who excelled in the Senior French Class.”⁵⁷ Less than a week later Poe, with no money to continue his schooling or pay his gambling debts, left the University.

When John Allan sent Poe the copy of *Gil Blas*, he bundled it with the two-volume *Cambridge Mathematics*, thus providing a practical textbook to counterbalance a seemingly frivolous piece of fiction. Poe received the package as a slap in the face. He had not registered for the mathematics course because Allan had not provided enough money to cover its cost. Poe believed a broad education was important and felt that mathematics would have enhanced his overall education significantly. He later applauded the educational

plan of Thomas R. Dew, President of William and Mary College: "The plan embraces a course of general study which may be pursued to great advantage by all, without reference to the nature of the profession contemplated . . . For a degree in the classical department it is necessary that the candidate should not only be a proficient in the [grammatical] studies just mentioned, but that he should obtain a certificate of qualification on the junior mathematical, rhetorical and historical courses."⁵⁸ Mathematics would later become an important aspect of Poe's critical and aesthetic theory. As Padraic Colum has observed, "Poe's mentality was a rare synthesis: he had elements in him that corresponded with the indefiniteness of music and the exactitude of mathematics."⁵⁹ Disappointed and embittered by Allan's lack of financial support, Poe returned to his Richmond home where, unsurprisingly, the two quarreled. Within a few months Poe moved into separate lodgings and left the city shortly thereafter.

After leaving Allan's home, Poe wrote to him asking for passage money to Boston. Allan refused, castigating Poe for his desultory reading and his apparent inability to concentrate on his studies. Allan had no idea that besides fulfilling his required coursework in languages, Poe had been teaching himself British historiography on the side. In his letter refusing to give Poe the passage money, Allan wrote:

I taught you to aspire, even to eminence in Public Life, but I never expected that *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Jo: Miller* and such works were calculated to promote the end . . . the charge of eating the Bread of idleness, was to urge you to perseverance and industry in receiving the classics, in perfecting yourself in the mathematics, mastering the French.⁶⁰

Allan's association of *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas* is unsurprising. Le Sage's debt to Cervantes was well known, and the two works were often linked together. Smollett had translated both. (Poe later critiqued Smollett's translation of *Don Quixote* for its "extreme fastidiousness."⁶¹) One contemporary writer, however, thought each appealed to different readers, for "literary men are most delighted with *Don Quixote*, and men of the world with *Gil Blas*."⁶² Linking the two books with *Joe Miller's Jest*s, a jestbook popular for so long that the name of its titular author had become proverbial, Allan further stressed his belief that Poe was wasting his time with frivolities.

John Allan's references to *Don Quixote* and *Joe Miller's Jest*s may

indicate books Poe had been reading after he left the University of Virginia and returned to Allan's Richmond home. It hardly seems unusual that Poe was indulging himself in pleasure reading. Besides *Joe Miller*, Poe may have been reading another, even older collection of humorous anecdotes, the *Gesta Romanorum*, a Latin work which had had a significant influence on medieval and Renaissance authors and which had recently appeared in a new English translation.⁶³ Reviewing another jestbook, Poe commented, "Never was there a better thing for whiling away a few loose or unappropriated half hours – that is to say in the hands of a reader who is, even in a moderate degree, imbued with a love of classical whimsicalities."⁶⁴ Many serious college students who devote themselves to the study of languages indulge in desultory reading once the school year is over. Poe's predicament was worse than that of the usual undergraduate, however, for he would not be returning to school when the next session started in February. Poe never forgave Allan for denying him an education: "A collegiate Education . . . was what I most ardently desired, and I had been led to expect that it would at some future time be granted – but in a moment of caprice – you have blasted my hope."