"Come!" he said at length, turning towards a table of richly enamelled and massive silver, upon which were a few goblets fantastically stained, together with two large Etruscan vases.

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Visionary," 1834

The volute-krater, a vase of imposing shape made from the Archaic through the Hellenistic period in mainland Greece, also found favor in the rich Greek colonies of South Italy in the fourth century B.C. Numerous pieces discovered there were avidly collected by European cognoscenti in the late eighteenth century. These large vases, with prominent handles curling into volutes at the top, are covered with mythological images painted in the red-figure technique and are often further decorated by molded faces on the handles and by the heads and necks of swans projecting where the handles join the body. Two vases of this type hold a prominent position at the entrance to The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Roman Court (Figures 1, 2).

The first, excavated in Apulia in 1786, was bought by Ferdinand IV, king of Naples, soon after its discovery, when such enormous vases were prestigious collectors’ items (Figure 1).² Perhaps an incentive for the king’s purchase was the fact that two other volute-kraters, said to have been dug up in Bari, had been acquired by his competitor, the great vase collector Sir William Hamilton (see Figure 3).³ Depicted on the front of King Ferdinand’s former volute-krater is an assembly of the deities Athena, Apollo, Artemis, and Herakles, and below them, an Amazonomachy—a battle between Greeks and Amazons. On the neck, Hekate, a goddess of the underworld with two torches in hand, leads a four-horse chariot driven by a winged Nike, or Victory. Elaborate ornamentation on the rim, neck, shoulder, lower belly, and under the handles fills most of the space not occupied by mythological scenes. Small figures of the young Pan prance under the volutes, each decorated with the horned head of Io, a nymph Etruscan turned into a heifer by Zeus. The reverse depicts a youth sitting in a shrine set between two other youths and two women, and here the neck is filled with an enormous palmette surrounded by additional ornamental leaves, tendrils, and flowers as well as other typical Greek ornament. The forefronts of four swans project at the join of the body to the neck of the vase.

A second South Italian vase at the Metropolitan is a typical fourth-century Apulian volute-krater, again with molded heads on the volutes and projecting swans’ heads and necks (Figure 2). The scene here shows the hero Perseus, with winged cap, making a pact with Cepheus, the father of Andromeda, whom he had rescued from a monster. The two men stand within a shrine, surrounded by seated and standing figures. The vase’s neck depicts the crowned head of a woman encircled by tendrils and flowers. The scene on the reverse shows a youth with spear and shield standing in a naiskos (shrine).

In the Neoclassical period, such Greek vases were admired not only for their own beauty, but also as models for new creations that proliferated throughout Britain and the Continent. Although certain scholars already had determined in the late eighteenth century that many of the pots discovered in Etruscan tombs and elsewhere on Italian soil were actually Greek, nonetheless the term “Etruscan” stuck.⁴ Two early nineteenth-century pots now in Richmond, Virginia, thought at the time to be imitating Etruscan vases, were typical of the products of numerous European manufacturers who made copies of ancient vases to satisfy the desire of travelers on the Grand Tour, as well as of Italians themselves. Such tourists, especially Englishmen, would ship them back as trophies or souvenirs to decorate their town houses or country homes.
John Allan, foster father of Edgar Allan Poe, probably owned the two pots in Richmond. He may have acquired them during his family’s five-year stay in England from 1815 to 1820, or later, in 1825, when outfitting his new Richmond mansion with European furnishings. They eventually made their way into the collection of his first wife’s nephew, Mann Satterwhite Valentine II (1824–1892), who kept them in his new home in Richmond, along with hoards of other curios and clutter (Figure 4). Upon his death, Mann Valentine bequeathed his house and collection of books, Indian relics, artifacts, paintings, and other works of art, which would have included the two Valentine vases, to the City of Richmond. His gift formed the core of the Valentine Museum, now named the Valentine Richmond History Center. The two Valentine “Etruscan” pots have an interesting history in themselves and take on added luster through what may be their cameo appearance in one of Edgar Allan Poe’s early short stories, “The Visionary,” later retitled “The Assignation.”

The Valentine Center’s two well-made vases, with shapes and designs taken from eighteenth-century engravings, are splendid representations of early nineteenth-century European taste. No more popular source for the decoration of classicizing pots existed than the two sets of volumes illustrating the successive collections of vases assembled in Naples by Sir William Hamilton, British Envoy Extraordinary at the court of Naples from 1764 to 1800. He sold his first collection of vases and other antiquities to the British Museum in 1772, a sale that partly
paid for the cost of publishing the vases in four sumptuous folio volumes: *Collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Antiquities from the Cabinet of the Honble. Wm. Hamilton, His Britannick Majesty’s Envoy Extraordinary at the Court of Naples* (1767–76). Its eccentric descriptions were written by “Baron d’Hancarville,” a nom de plume for the roguish antiquary Pierre-François Hugues. For this publication, hereafter referred to as “d’Hancarville,” Hamilton had a new typeface created and cast in Venice at enormous cost, and Neapolitan artists hand-colored its engraved plates, making the set too expensive to serve his stated purpose of educating Europe’s craftsmen in the finest ancient drawing.

The publication of Hamilton’s new, second collection of vases was accordingly undertaken in Naples in a less costly format by the German artist Wilhelm Tischbein: *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases* (1791–95), hereafter referred to as “Tischbein.” Most surviving sets have three folio volumes; a fourth is rarer because many copies were burned during the invasion of Naples by French troops in 1798, before they were bound. Plates from both of Hamilton’s collections would serve as the source for the artists who made the two Valentine vases.

The larger of the two pots, a well-painted vase imitating an Apulian red-figured volute-krater of the late fourth century B.C. (Figures 5, 6), appears on the tall glass-fronted case at the back right of a photograph of Mann S. Valentine’s drawing room (see Figure 4). The picture, dated June 23, 1894, was taken only two years after the foundation of his museum. This volute-krater, broken in a fall, was repaired in 1959, and a photograph of it was published in 1973 by a curator of the Valentine Museum who identified it as a Greek original.

Both main scenes on the Valentine volute-krater, front and back, are copied from engravings in the third volume in Tischbein’s publication of Hamilton’s second collection, and both are presented as deriving from a single original Greek vase, now lost. Greek vases normally have a primary side (called, in modern terminology, Side A), with the more elaborate scene or more carefully painted figures; and a secondary side that was usually painted in a simpler, more careless manner (Side B). However, on the Valentine volute-krater neither illustration is typical of a Side B, and Tischbein usually did not show the second side in his engravings. Most likely the two scenes come from the Sides A of two separate pots.

The scene on the body of Side A (Figure 7) is taken from Tischbein (vol. 3, pl. 21) and probably decorated a Campanian bell-krater (Figure 8). At the lower left of
Tischbein’s plate, a hermaphrodite drives a chariot drawn by a griffin and a panther or lynx, while Eros, turning back, leads the procession. This figure is described as “Diana Egeria” by Chevalier Andrei Italinski (Minister Plenipotentiary of H.M. the Emperor of all the Russias to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies), a learned linguist, trusted diplomat, and scholarly drudge, who wrote much of the text for Hamilton’s volumes 2 and 3 in the Tischbein publication. Italinski points out that both Macrobius (III.8) and the apocryphal ancient author “Orpheus” say this goddess was bisexual, in which case a hermaphrodite would be an appropriate representation. However, in the painting of this figure on the Valentine vase, the hermaphrodite has been transformed into a nude Aphrodite, with no sign of the male genitalia that were clearly defined in Tischbein’s plate. Above the figure of Aphrodite/Diana Egeria, Artemis leans back, spear in hand. In the center sits a woman with a basket or libation bowl, and at right Nike stands with a mirror. On the neck of Side A, at left, is a charioteer with his cape billowing out, driving two horses, and at right is a horseman who turns back toward the charioteer and appears to be fleeing (see Figure 5).

The scene on the body of Side B of the Valentine volute-krater (Figure 9) is a copy of Tischbein (vol. 3, pl. 22) (Figure 10). In the lower register, a maenad walks to left between two prancing panthers, and above, three other women (maenads?) walk or dance, while a swan alights on a lustral basin that looks much like a birdbath. Italinski, mistakenly supposing that both plates came from one vase,
linked Diana on Side A with the swan on Side B, pointing out the reference to Diana's brother Apollo, who is often represented by the bird. Filling ornament in the picture field, reproducing that on Tischbein's plates, decorates both sides of the vase.

On the neck (see Figure 6) a dancing figure with tambourine and a seated figure with a mirror are watched by a draped and a naked man on the left, and at right by a satyr with a torch. This scene is not copied after the engravings of Hamilton's vases, yet the shape of the Valentine volute-krater itself seems to be copied from the third of the extra (unnumbered) plates at the beginning of Tischbein's second volume, engravings illustrating various shapes of Greek pots. This image follows a shape typical of volute-kraters from late fourth-century Apulia.

The second Valentine vase, a chalice with knotted handles (Figures 11, 12), sat atop another glass-fronted case on the left wall in the photograph of Mann S. Valentine's drawing room (see Figure 4), although its handles at the time were detached and stored inside the chalice. At each
of the four ropelike ends, where the chalice’s handles are attached to the rim, a tiny female (?!) frontal face is worked freehand into the clay (Figure 13).

The chalice is an imitation of a Hellenistic Etruscan kantharos with knotted handles. Parallels to the shape are found among pots of the so-called Malacena ware made in North Italy near Viterbo, and of the Gnathian ware made in Apulia, where even the little faces on the handles are sometimes present. It is not clear which model was used by the potter of the Valentine vase, but a similar one (without the faces worked into the clay on the handles) is illustrated in d’Hancarville’s publication of Hamilton’s vases (vol. 3, pls. 101 [Figure 14] and 102).

Side A of the chalice, a black-figured scene with warriors, a horse, and a seated man, has been copied after a lost Attic lekythos by the Edinburgh Painter once in the Hamilton collection (Tischbein, vol. 2, pl. 4) (Figure 15). On its neck is a boar hunt with elements drawn from similar Attic black-figured hunting scenes. The body of Side B illustrates the theme of Thebans bringing offerings to placate the Sphinx, who sits on an altar. The neck depicts a battle scene copied after Hamilton’s Greek original, illustrated in d’Hancarville (vol. 1, pl. 62), but reversed (Figure 16).

Imitations of ancient Greek volute-kraters were made by numerous European potteries, including Wedgwood, Sèvres, and Ipsen (in England, France, and Denmark, respectively). But the workmanship of the Valentine pots is not typical of any of these potteries. Instead, close parallels are found with the Neapolitan Giustiniani pottery, begun by Nicola Giustiniani in 1760 and active until about 1885. Their pots are often marked with a “G” on the underside of the foot, but both of the Valentine vases have been strengthened with a modern restorer’s plaster on the underside, so that any “G” (or other mark) that might have been there has been obscured. However, stylistic parallels and the shapes of the pots confirm the identification of the Valentine vases as products of the Giustiniani pottery.

In 1815, upon the death of Nicola, his son Biagio Giustiniani took over the firm, and it was he who promoted the production for which Giustiniani is most well known: earthenware vases made “ad imitazione degli Etruschi.” It is clear that the Giustiniani pottery had at its disposal copies of d’Hancarville’s and Tischbein’s volumes of Hamilton’s vase collections and that they used them as sources for the Valentine vases as well as other pots made in the “Etruscan style.”

The Valentine volute-krater, with female heads on the volutes and swans’ heads at the base of the handles, is a form after the Antique that was popular with the Giustiniani pottery, and can be compared with other confirmed Giustiniani works. One parallel in the Museo Nazionale di San Martino in Naples (Figure 17), copied after an Apulian volute-krater from Ruvo, is similar not only in shape but also in decoration. The neck again displays two sets of horsemen, riding toward the right, and rosettes and other standard motifs around the upper neck. The molded and applied
heads of females on the volute handles are different, but the swans’ heads protruding from the base of the handles are essentially identical.

The second Valentine pot, the chalice, is of the same shape as a Giustiniani piece, identified by the firm’s “G” mark, again in the Museo Nazionale di San Martino in Naples (Figure 18). This chalice has many of the same features as the Valentine vase, including the knotted handles, the tiny faces at the join of handles to rim, and the shape of rim, neck, body, and foot. It, too, confirms the Giustiniani manufacture of the Valentine vase.

The literary progeny of the two Giustiniani vases in Richmond may come as a surprise. They seem to have played a role in Edgar Allan Poe’s tale “The Visionary,” written at the latest by 1833, when the author was twenty-four years old. Its scene is Venice. As the anonymous narrator’s gondola approaches the Ducal Palace, he hears a woman’s scream. The beautiful young marchesa Aphrodite has accidentally let her infant slip into the canal. Suddenly, out of the shadows, a gallant figure (the hero) appears and plunges into the water, rescuing the child. He returns the baby to the marchesa and her malevolent husband, the aged marchese.
After her husband returns to the house, the marchesa, blushing, lets her hand fall upon the hero’s hand and whispers to him that they should meet again an hour after sunrise. The narrator of this tale, offering his gondola, then returns the hero to his palazzo, but not before the hero begs the narrator to visit him there again early the next morning. When the narrator pays his visit, the hero shows him a collection of objects of extravagant expense and beauty. Lastly, he unveils a full-length portrait of marchesa Aphrodite, who points downward to “a curiously fashioned vase” at her feet. Then, the hero speaks to the narrator:

“Come!” he said at length, turning towards a table of richly enamelled and massive silver, upon which were a few goblets fantastically stained, together with two large Etruscan vases, fashioned in the same extraordinary model as that in the foreground of the portrait, and filled with what I supposed to be Johannisberger. “Come!” he said abruptly, “let us drink!”

The hero then swallows several cups of the wine and “[holds] up to the rich light of a censer one of the magnificent vases.” As the narrator discovers only after it is too late, the hero is committing suicide by having placed poison inside his cup. Staggering back from finding the hero “riveted in death,” the narrator’s hand falls “upon a cracked and blackened goblet,” the evidence proving how his host had died. At that moment, a servant of the marchesa’s household “burst into the room, and...in a voice choking with emotion,” cried out, “My mistress!—my mistress!—poisoned! Oh beautiful—oh beautiful Aphrodite!” Thus, the two lovers, one near the marchesa’s portrait, the marchesa in her husband’s palazzo, have committed suicide together.

Poe submitted six short stories to a competition held in the autumn of 1833 by the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* [sic], and later he noted that “The Visionary” was one of them. In 1834 Poe first published the text of this story anonymously in *Godsey’s Lady’s Book*, and in the following year, he released a slightly revised and still anonymous version in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, a journal in Richmond of


which he soon became editor. In 1840 he issued it yet again in his book *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, with minor changes, but this time under his own name. Finally, in 1845, he published it for the last time during his life, but now with a new title, “The Assigination,” which is the one used ever since. Poe died in 1849 at age forty.

For our purposes, one of the most interesting details, present in all versions, is that of the “two large Etruscan vases, fashioned in the same extraordinary model as that in the foreground of the portrait.” It is possible that Poe was referring to the very objects likely known to him from his foster father’s household. Furthermore, in the version published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Poe made a change that connects the Valentine vases with his story even more clearly: the marchesa’s name is switched from Bianca (in the *Lady’s Book*) to Aphrodite. This alteration links the heroine to the decoration of Side A of the volute-krater, where perhaps the most eye-catching feature is the nude figure of Aphrodite driving the griffin and lion chariot.

The relationship between Poe’s story and the Valentine vases depends in part on the dates of the classicizing pots by the Giustiniani firm in Naples, and in part on the probable date when they might have been acquired by John Allan. The two pots could have been made between 1815, when the Bourbon court returned from exile in Sicily and Biagio Giustiniani took over his father’s firm, and 1840. When would John Allan have acquired the vases, and how do we know they had been made by the Giustiniani firm in time for Allan to have bought them, and for Poe to have included them in his story, first published as “The Visionary” in 1834? Allan took his family to Britain in 1815 (when Poe was six years old), in order to open an English branch of the Richmond firm of Ellis and Allan, merchants. Unfortunately for him and Ellis, in 1816 England went through its post-Napoleonic financial crisis, and after a promising start, the English venture failed; Allan and his family returned to Richmond in 1820. Assuming that the Giustiniani pots were made in the late teens or 1820, a reasonable date for their manufacture, then John Allan may have acquired them in England before his departure and had them shipped home. All of this assumes that a dealer or traveler on the Grand Tour had meanwhile sent the vases from Naples to England, a likelihood supported by the fact that transport from Naples to England was made possible in 1816 by a shipping treaty with the Neapolitan court that was much to England’s advantage. On the other hand, Allan continued to run his tobacco-export business with the United Kingdom, and could have received the vases through his British contacts at a later date. A further possibility is that Allan acquired them as part of the European furnishings he purchased to fill his substantial house, Moldavia, which he bought when he came into a large inheritance in 1825.

A potential difficulty in this explanation is that the two vases in question may not have been brought to Virginia by Allan after all, but rather by his relative through marriage: Edward Virginius Valentine (1838–1930), brother of Mann S. Valentine, the founder of the Valentine Museum. He was a sculptor from Richmond who traveled to Paris, Florence, and Rome. In May 1861, according to his passport, he was in Naples, at that time a lawless place because of the merging of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies into the Kingdom of Italy only two months earlier. His stay in Naples was certainly short, for he was in Berlin by June of that year. He studied in Berlin with the noted sculptor August Kiss until the latter’s death in 1865, and then left for Virginia, thus escaping the Civil War and the burning of Richmond at its conclusion. During that disaster, the Valentine collection and Edward’s studio were located in a section of the city that remained untouched. After he returned, Valentine became a distinguished sculptor and created fine statues of Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jefferson, and many others, as well as classicizing works such as *Andromache and Astyanax*. He was the first president of the Valentine Museum and bequeathed his own substantial collection of sculpture and plaster casts to that institution. Although it is possible that he acquired the two Giustiniani vases in Europe, in which case Poe could not have known them, this is a highly unlikely scenario. Furthermore, an examination of several hundred expense receipts from Europe, as well as the remnants of the diaries of Edward V. Valentine, produces no support for that assumption.

Mann S. Valentine died in 1892, and the museum was organized between 1894 and 1898. The codicil to his will states, “Many years of the life of my father and my brothers and my sons and myself have been devoted to securing and accumulating objects of archaeology and anthropology with a view and purpose of making them valuable to my state and city, and in order to preserve them . . . I desire to establish . . . an institute to be called the Valentine Museum.” Despite the uncertainty, oral history—via word of mouth through the curators at the Valentine Museum—claims that the two vases came from John Allan’s house. We suggest that the greatest likelihood is that Allan owned the vases and displayed them at his home, Moldavia, while Poe lived there shortly after 1825, and that they later served as inspiration for Poe’s early romantic story, “The Visionary.” This proposal adds a new dimension to the cultural history of Giustiniani’s pottery manufacture, and brings two fine Neapolitan copies of “Etruscan” vases, of the sort seen in the Metropolitan Museum, into the orbit of one of the greatest American poets and storytellers.
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NOTES

1. Poe 1834, p. 43.
3. British Museum GR 1772.3-20.14 (Figure 3) and F 282. See Jenkins and Sloan 1996, pp. 108–10; and Ramage 1990.
4. On Greek pots thought to be Etruscan vases, see most recently Ramage 2011a.
6. On the dating of this publication, see Ramage 1991, p. 35.
7. The volute-krater shows a fair bit of clumsy inpainting on the shoulders of the vase and on the upper right sides of the body of Sides A and B, all applied during the restoration in 1959.
9. Trendall 1967, p. 546, no. 845. The original seems to have been Campanian by the Painter of BM F229 in the Rhomboid Group; letter from A. D. Trendall to R. D. Crome, January 8, 1976. Trendall added, “The original could not have been a volute-krater, since this shape is not found in Campania, but was more probably one of the large calyx-kraters popular in this group.” For the most recent publication on such vases, see Nava et al. 2009.
11. Italienski labored under the curious idea that “Etruscan” pots would contain scenes from Roman history and myths, and thus mangles many of his explanations for scenes on Hamilton’s pots. He also explained other images by referring to the Greek “mystery” cults. For Diana Egeria, a Roman rather than a Greek goddess, see Green 2007.
12. The handles of the chalice were reattached, but this vase has no other restoration or inpainting.
13. Beazley and Magi 1939, p. 93, pl. 35, and Beazley 1956, pp. 230–31. This type of kantharos is also related to Hellenistic Attic kantharoi, dated 290–270 B.C. See Rotroff 1997, pp. 89–90, nos. 94–100, fig. 9 and pl. 10. We are grateful to Joan R. Mertens for bringing these pots to our attention.
17. We are grateful to Paul Lewis, independent researcher, who first suggested this possibility to us, and to Carlo Knight, Neapolitan scholar, for further enlightenment on the identification. On the Giustiniani firm, see Rotili 1981. See also Haggar 1960, p. 208, and Continental Furniture, Tapestries, Works of Art, Ceramics, & Carpets, sale cat., Christie’s, New York, September 29, 1999, sale 9214, lots 342ff. This family of potters and decorators had already flourished in the early eighteenth century in a pottery located in Cerreto (Benevento); see Vigiotti 1973.
18. Similar work was done by the Neapolitan firm of del Vecchio, although no parallels as close as those for Giustiniani were found among their signed works. It is worth noting that Gaetano del Vecchio took over the family firm at least by 1818, and some of his pots bear a strong resemblance to the Valentine chalice. For del Vecchio, see Donatone 1991, pp. 93–100. Several vases by Giustiniani and del Vecchio were auctioned by Christie’s, New York, on April 19, 2012 (sale 2545, lots 350ff.). Our thanks to James David Draper, Henry R. Kravis Curator, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum, for alerting us to the sale, and again, we are grateful to Carlo Knight for leading us to the del Vecchio manufactory.
19. See Rotili 1981, pl. 11, and Carola-Perrotti, Donatone, and Ruij 1984, fig. 64.
23. Ibid.
24. Southern Literary Messenger, August 1835. See French 1918. See also Fisher 1986 and Mabbott 2000, pp. 148–69, for a good analysis of the publication of this work.
25. Published in Broadway Journal of June 7, 1845, when Poe was editor and part owner of this short-lived magazine. The new title, “The Assignment,” was kept by the editors for the publication The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe (Willis, Lowell, and Griswold 1850).
26. The use of the term “Etruscan” must be purposeful here. Poe explains his own use of such objects in an anonymous review praising his edition of Tales (1845), in which he explains “Mr. Poe’s” use of detail. From The Aristidean, October 1845; full text, Thompson 1984, pp. 871, 873.
27. In a letter of the Christmas season in 1831, when Poe was a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, Allan permanently banned him from his house, cut off his funds, and forbade all further contact. In addition to the long-standing hostility between the two, the immediate cause of the rift may have been Poe’s probable use for his own purposes of a sum of money—“a bounty”—from Allan that was meant to pay a “substitute” who had been hired to complete Poe’s term of service in the army. Furthermore, Poe had written the substitute, suggesting that Allan probably didn’t pay him because of his perpetual drunkenness . . . a letter that the substitute had forwarded to Allan. In 1834 Poe paid a visit to the dying Allan, who drove him out of the house. Allan died on March 7, 1834, without mentioning Poe in his will. Ostrom, Pollin, and Savoye 2008, vol. 1, pp. 61ff.
28. For the dates of manufacture, see Carola-Perrotti, Donatone, and Ruij 1984.
29. In 1816 England signed a new Most Favored Nation trade treaty (“il privilegio di bandiera”) with the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The treaty was not reciprocal for Naples, and imports into England, on English ships, increased apace. On the treaty and nature of English imports from the kingdom in 1816, see Pontieri 1961, pp. 282–87, 292–95, and Pelliccio 2004, pp. 80, 84–86; on England’s advantages, see Solimene 1840, pp. 10–17, the complete text of the 1816 treaty in Italian.
30. The relative was William Galt, whose will, and the will and codicils of John Allan, are published in Allen 1934, pp. 687–91.
31. His sales slips indicate that he mostly bought books and a few figurines, all of which would have had to be shipped to Richmond, which was already under threat of the disaster that eventually befall it.
32. Valentine n.d. [ca. 1922], p. 2354.

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