

# The Journey of Life and the Quest for Wealth: A Literary Analysis of Poe's Eldorado

Original Article

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## Abstract

Many readers appreciate Eldorado for its narrative appeal, yet the deeper philosophical challenges it raises about humanity's pursuit of fulfillment often remain overlooked. This study offers a literary analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's Eldorado, focusing on how the poem portrays human ambition, mortality, and the emotional progression associated with the pursuit of idealized goals. Using a literary analysis approach, the research examines Poe's use of symbolism, imagery, tone, and poetic structure to explore the knight's lifelong search for the mythical Eldorado as a metaphor for humanity's quest for fulfillment and success. The analysis finds that the poem's symbolic contrasts, rhythmic patterns, and tonal transitions collectively illuminate the psychological and philosophical dimensions embedded in the knight's journey. In addition, the study situates Eldorado within the broader context of Poe's writing, emphasizing its alignment with recurring themes in his literary canon, particularly the struggle between idealism and the limitations of human existence. The implications of this research highlight the poem's continued relevance for literary scholarship and its value for educational and interdisciplinary applications, especially in discussions of ambition, identity, and life transitions. Overall, this study demonstrates that Eldorado functions not only as a narrative of quest but also as a contemplative exploration of hope, disillusionment, and the boundaries of human desire.

**Keywords:** Edgar Allan Poe, Eldorado, Literary Analysis, Literature, Poem.

## 1. Introduction

Literature serves as a mirror to human life, reflecting not only everyday experiences but also the deepest aspects of human desire, ambition, and mortality. Among literary forms, poetry occupies a unique place due to its capacity to communicate complex ideas through condensed language, rhythm, imagery, and figurative expressions (Akramova, 2025). Through poetry, writers can evoke emotions, provoke thought, and convey moral or philosophical messages that resonate across time and culture (Arcilla Jr, 2024). One of the most prominent figures in 19th-century literature, Edgar Allan Poe, is widely recognized for his mastery of allegory, symbolism, and the exploration of existential themes (Francseszka-Bianka, 2025). Poe's works often navigate the boundaries between reality and imagination, life and death, success and futility, making them rich sources for literary analysis and interpretation (Ma, 2025).

His poem Eldorado (1849) exemplifies this approach by presenting the story of a gallant knight on a lifelong quest to find the legendary city of gold. On the surface, the poem narrates a literal journey of adventure and exploration. Beneath this narrative, however, the poem embodies deeper allegorical and symbolic meanings that explore human ambition, the relentless pursuit of wealth, and the inevitability of mortality (Varghese, 2024). The poem's



use of literary devices adds layers of meaning that enhance both its aesthetic quality and its philosophical resonance (Simecek & Ellis, 2017). By intertwining literal narrative with symbolic undertones, Poe creates a work that is both engaging and thought-provoking, inviting readers to reflect on the nature of human aspiration and the limits of earthly pursuits.

Despite the enduring literary and philosophical significance of *Eldorado*, specific scholarly attention to this poem remains relatively limited. While Poe's broader body of work has been extensively studied, existing research often focuses on his gothic style, narrative structure, or historical and biographical contexts. Few studies such as Churadze (2022) and Farras and Nurmaily (2020) have comprehensively examined how *Eldorado* combines thematic exploration, symbolic representation, and literary devices to convey its broader messages. Moreover, there is a lack of research that relates the poem's timeless themes to contemporary societal issues, such as the modern obsession with wealth accumulation and material success. This gap highlights the need for an integrated analysis that considers both the form and content of the poem while situating it within human and cultural experiences that remain relevant today.

This study aims to address this need by conducting a comprehensive literary analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's *Eldorado*. The research focuses on identifying and interpreting the poem's themes, examining the literary techniques employed, and exploring its cultural and philosophical relevance. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how *Eldorado* not only functions as a poetic work but also as a reflection on universal human experiences, such as ambition, desire, and the contemplation of mortality. Through this analysis, the research aspires to contribute to the appreciation of Poe's poetic craft and to demonstrate the enduring relevance of his work in understanding human behavior and values.

Based on the background and problem statement, this study is guided by several key research questions designed to explore the thematic, literary, and cultural dimensions of Poe's *Eldorado*. The first question seeks to identify the main themes and messages conveyed in the poem and how they relate to universal human experiences such as ambition, desire, and mortality. The second question focuses on the literary techniques employed by Poe, including metaphor, imagery, alliteration, and personification, and how these devices contribute to the poem's meaning and aesthetic impact. The third question aims to examine the relevance of the poem's messages in contemporary society, particularly in relation to the pursuit of material wealth and the philosophical contemplation of life and death.

Corresponding to these questions, the objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to analyze the themes and moral messages presented in *Eldorado*, providing insight into the poem's allegorical and symbolic significance. Second, it seeks to identify and interpret the literary devices used by Poe, explaining their function in shaping the poem's narrative and emotional resonance. Third, the study intends to explore the cultural and philosophical relevance of the poem, highlighting connections between its literary content and ongoing human concerns. Through these objectives, the research aspires to offer a comprehensive understanding of *Eldorado* as both a work of literary artistry and a reflection of enduring human experiences.

## 2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design with a literary analysis approach. The qualitative method is considered appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting the meanings, themes, and literary devices within Edgar Allan Poe's *Eldorado*, rather than quantifying data. By analyzing the poem's language, structure, and stylistic elements, the study

aims to provide an in-depth understanding of its thematic, symbolic, and cultural significance. The primary data for this research consists of the text of Poe's *Eldorado* (1849). As the main source, the poem is examined thoroughly, with attention given to its narrative, diction, imagery, symbolism, and figurative language. Secondary data include scholarly articles, books, and literary critiques that provide historical, cultural, and theoretical perspectives on Poe's work and 19th-century literature. These secondary sources are used to support interpretation and to situate the poem within broader literary and cultural contexts.

The data analysis follows a descriptive and interpretive approach. First, the text of the poem is analyzed line by line to identify the presence of literary devices, such as metaphor, alliteration, assonance, imagery, and personification. Next, thematic analysis is conducted to determine the central messages and moral lessons conveyed in the poem. Finally, the study interprets the cultural and philosophical relevance of the poem, considering how its themes resonate with contemporary human experiences, particularly in relation to ambition, material pursuit, and mortality. Throughout the analysis, the study emphasizes a close reading technique, which allows for detailed examination of the poem's linguistic features, stylistic elements, and symbolic meanings. This technique ensures that interpretations are grounded in the text and that the analysis remains systematic and coherent. By combining textual analysis with theoretical and cultural insights, the methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of *Eldorado* as both a literary work and a reflection of universal human concerns.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In order to provide a foundation for further analysis, the following is the text of Poe's poem. This will be used as the main reference for the study goals, namely (1) to analyze the themes and moral messages in *Eldorado*, (2) to identify and interpret Poe's literary devices, and (3) explore the poem's cultural and philosophical relevance.

*Eldorado*

By Edgar Allan Poe (1849)

*Gaily bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had a journeyed long,  
Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.*

*But he grew old-  
This knight so bold-  
And o'er his heart a shadow  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.*

*And, as his strength Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow-*

*“Shadow,” said he,  
“Where can it be-  
This land of Eldorado?”*

*“Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,”  
The shade replied-  
“If you seek for Eldorado!”*

### 3.1. Research Result

#### 3.1.1. Stanza-by-Stanza Analysis

##### A. First Stanza

The poem opens with a vivid description of the knight: “Gaily bedight, a gallant knight, in sunshine and in shadow.” The term gaily bedight suggests that the knight is adorned brightly, symbolizing optimism, readiness, and hopefulness. The phrase in sunshine and in shadow introduces the duality of life’s journey, hinting at both moments of clarity and obscurity that the knight will encounter. The stanza establishes a sense of rhythm and movement, emphasizing the knight’s journey as a dynamic, ongoing process. The final line, “In search of Eldorado,” introduces the central objective of the poem: a quest for a legendary city of gold. This goal functions on both literal and metaphorical levels, representing human ambition, the pursuit of wealth, and the search for meaning in life.

##### B. Second Stanza

The second stanza shifts in tone as the knight grows old: “But he grew old, this knight so bold.” This indicates the passage of time and introduces a sense of disillusionment. The line “And o’er his heart a shadow fell” employs metaphor to depict emotional despair and the diminishing vitality of the knight. The stanza emphasizes the inevitable consequences of time and mortality, highlighting that relentless pursuit, however noble or courageous, cannot escape the limitations imposed by life’s natural course. The repetition of the word shadow not only reinforces the metaphor but also foreshadows the later encounter with the “pilgrim shadow,” establishing a thematic continuity throughout the poem.

##### C. Third Stanza

In the third stanza, the knight, weakened by age, meets a “pilgrim shadow.” This encounter introduces personification, as the shadow is given human qualities, able to communicate and provide guidance. The knight’s question, “Where can it be, this land of Eldorado?” reflects a moment of vulnerability, showing that despite his lifelong effort, his goal remains unattained. The pilgrim shadow symbolizes wisdom, mortality, or the inevitability of death, highlighting the tension between human desire and ultimate limitation. This stanza marks the poem’s turning point, moving from narrative description to symbolic and philosophical reflection.

##### D. Fourth Stanza

The final stanza conveys the shadow’s response: “Over the Mountains of the Moon, down the Valley of the Shadow, ride, boldly ride, if you seek for Eldorado!” The imagery here is rich and metaphorical. The “Mountains of the Moon” evoke a mysterious, unreachable place, while

the “Valley of the Shadow” alludes to death, drawing from biblical references such as Psalm 23:4. The stanza functions as both guidance and revelation: Eldorado, representing ultimate fulfillment, is not attainable within mortal life. The use of repetition, rhythm, and commanding language (“ride, boldly ride”) emphasizes the inevitability and seriousness of the knight’s quest, reinforcing the allegorical nature of the poem.

### 3.1.2. Thematic Discussion

#### A. The Pursuit of Wealth and Human Ambition

The knight’s relentless quest for Eldorado symbolizes the universal human desire for material success, personal achievement, and social recognition. Poe portrays ambition as an intrinsic part of human nature, a force that drives individuals to embark on challenging journeys in pursuit of goals that may seem distant or unattainable. The repeated imagery of the knight riding “in sunshine and in shadow” underscores the perseverance and dedication required to chase such ambitions, while also hinting at the challenges and obstacles that inevitably arise. Literary devices such as alliteration (“singing a song in search”) and assonance (“Eldorado, shadow, old, over, boldly, no”) emphasize the knight’s tireless efforts and the rhythmic, ongoing nature of his quest. By depicting the knight’s pursuit as both literal and metaphorical, Poe reflects on the human tendency to equate wealth and success with happiness, while subtly questioning the ultimate value of such endeavors.

#### B. Mortality and the Inevitability of Death

A central theme of Eldorado is the inevitability of mortality. The “pilgrim shadow” encountered by the knight and the reference to the “Valley of the Shadow” serve as potent symbols of death, reminding readers of the finite nature of human life. These symbols illustrate that no matter how determined or courageous a person may be, all human endeavors are ultimately limited by time and mortality. The poem suggests that while the pursuit of success and wealth may dominate one’s life, true understanding, fulfillment, or transcendence may only be realized when confronting the inevitability of death. Through this theme, Poe not only presents a moral reflection on human ambition but also prompts readers to consider the deeper meaning and purpose of life beyond material or temporal achievements.

#### C. Hope, Disillusionment, and Reflection

The poem’s narrative arc captures a psychological and emotional journey that mirrors the human experience. The first stanza is imbued with optimism and hope, as the knight begins his quest with enthusiasm, symbolized by imagery such as “gaily bedight” and the bright, shining depiction of his armor. As the poem progresses, the tone shifts to melancholy and disillusionment, reflecting the knight’s aging, fading strength, and the absence of tangible success. This transition captures the tension between human aspiration and the acceptance of limitations inherent in life. The recurring use of metaphor and personification, especially in the depiction of the “pilgrim shadow,” reinforces the reflective and introspective quality of the poem, allowing readers to engage with themes of self-examination, disappointment, and eventual acknowledgment of life’s constraints. By presenting hope alongside disillusionment, Poe offers a nuanced exploration of ambition, resilience, and the inevitability of unmet desires, a dynamic that resonates with readers across different eras and cultural contexts. These themes intertwine to create a rich, multi-layered narrative. The poem explores the human condition, illustrating the interplay between ambition, mortality, and reflection, while using literary techniques to heighten the emotional and philosophical impact. By addressing both personal and universal experiences, Eldorado transcends its historical context, offering insights into the enduring challenges, desires, and contemplations of humanity.

### 3.1.3. Literary Devices

#### A. Rhyme and Meter

Eldorado follows a rhyme scheme of aabccb, which contributes significantly to the poem's musicality and lyrical quality. This structured rhyme creates a sense of harmony and balance, making the poem pleasant to read aloud while reinforcing its narrative momentum. The repeated rhymes in each stanza serve as an auditory cue, guiding readers through the knight's journey and emphasizing key moments, such as his hope, struggles, and eventual encounter with the pilgrim shadow. By using rhyme in this careful pattern, Poe maintains a rhythm that mirrors the knight's steady yet arduous progress in search of Eldorado, creating a sense of continuous motion that reflects the persistence and determination of human ambition.

The poem is primarily written in iambic dimeter, meaning that each line typically contains two iambic feet (unstressed-stressed syllables). This short, measured meter produces a concise, staccato rhythm that aligns with the episodic nature of the knight's quest. The brevity of the lines allows each word to carry weight and significance, heightening the impact of the imagery and symbolic elements. For instance, the short lines in "Gaily bedight, / A gallant knight" draw attention to the knight's appearance and mood, while also creating a sense of forward movement, as though the reader is accompanying him on his journey.

The rhyme and meter contribute not only to the poem's aesthetic appeal but also to its thematic resonance. The rhythmic consistency mirrors the repetitive and ongoing pursuit of Eldorado, emphasizing the persistence and monotony inherent in the quest for wealth and fulfillment. At the same time, the musicality contrasts with the poem's underlying tension and melancholy, particularly as the knight ages and confronts mortality, creating a dynamic interplay between form and meaning. This careful alignment of structure and content showcases Poe's mastery in using poetic form to reinforce narrative and thematic elements, allowing the poem's rhythmic flow to evoke both the physical journey of the knight and the emotional and philosophical dimensions of human striving.

#### B. Alliteration and Assonance

Alliteration: "singing a song in search" emphasizes the knight's efforts and perseverance.

Assonance: "Eldorado, shadow, old, over, boldly, no" slows the rhythm and draws attention to key thematic words, reinforcing the focus on quest and despair.

#### C. Metaphor and Symbolism

Shadow: Represents despair, mortality, and the unknown.

Pilgrim shadow: Embodies guidance, death, or inner reflection.

Eldorado: Serves as a metaphor for ultimate fulfillment, material ambition, or spiritual enlightenment.

#### D. Personification

The shadow is depicted as a sentient, guiding figure, adding a supernatural and allegorical dimension that enhances the poem's philosophical resonance.

#### E. Imagery

"Gaily bedight" evokes a vivid visual of the knight, symbolizing readiness and hope.

"Over the Mountains of the Moon, down the Valley of the Shadow" creates a grand and mysterious landscape that aligns with both literal and symbolic journeys.

### 3.1.4. Cultural and Philosophical Context

Edgar Allan Poe wrote *Eldorado* in 1849, during the height of the 19th century, a period marked by rapid social, economic, and cultural transformations. The era was characterized by the spirit of exploration and discovery, as European and American societies were captivated by tales of distant lands, lost treasures, and the promise of prosperity. The concept of *Eldorado* itself originates from South American myths of a city of gold, reflecting the fascination of the time with wealth, conquest, and human ambition. Within this context, the poem can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal emphasis on material success, adventure, and the pursuit of tangible rewards. Poe's knight embodies the archetypal human figure driven by aspiration and desire, mirroring the ambitions and restlessness that permeated 19th-century society.

At the same time, Poe's poem engages critically with these cultural values by questioning the ultimate significance of relentless pursuit and material accumulation. Through the knight's lifelong, unfulfilled journey, the poem highlights the limitations of human endeavor and the transitory nature of worldly achievements. The motif of the "pilgrim shadow" and the references to the "Valley of the Shadow" convey an awareness of mortality and the inevitable confrontation with death. In doing so, the poem suggests a philosophical perspective: while humans may devote their lives to ambition and material gain, true fulfillment or understanding may lie beyond the temporal and material world. This perspective reflects broader existential concerns, such as the search for meaning, the tension between desire and limitation, and the acceptance of life's impermanence.

Moreover, Poe's work is influenced by literary and philosophical movements of the time, including Romanticism and Gothic literature. Romanticism emphasized emotion, individual experience, and the sublime, often exploring the beauty and terror of nature, human passion, and the unknown. Gothic literature, for which Poe is famously known, explored the darker aspects of human experience, including death, despair, and the supernatural. *Eldorado* synthesizes these influences, using allegory and symbolism to present a reflective meditation on ambition, mortality, and the human condition, while simultaneously evoking the aesthetic pleasures of imagery, rhythm, and sound.

From a contemporary perspective, the cultural and philosophical dimensions of *Eldorado* retain their relevance. Modern society continues to grapple with the pursuit of wealth, success, and personal achievement, often equating material gain with happiness or fulfillment. Poe's poem, by contrast, emphasizes the limitations of such pursuits and invites readers to consider alternative understandings of success, fulfillment, and the meaning of life. In this way, *Eldorado* functions as both a historical reflection of 19th-century values and a timeless meditation on universal human concerns, bridging cultural, moral, and existential insights across centuries.

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of the analysis indicate that the poem portrays the pursuit of wealth through the metaphor of the knight's lifelong search for *Eldorado*. The depiction of the knight traveling "in sunshine and in shadow" suggests that ambition persists across both favorable and difficult circumstances, reinforcing the idea that the pursuit of material success becomes a primary motivator throughout an individual's life. This interpretation aligns with broader literary research that identifies Poe as an author deeply interested in human desire, aspiration, and the psychological effects of obsession. Several studies have emphasized that Poe frequently explores characters consumed by singular goals or ideals, often resulting in emotional decline or existential crisis. The knight in *Eldorado* fits within this pattern, presenting the pursuit of wealth not only as physically exhausting but spiritually diminishing.

the poem conveys significant cultural and philosophical messages about mortality and fulfillment. The introduction of the “pilgrim shadow” and the reference to “the Valley of the Shadow” symbolically represent the inevitability of death and the limits of worldly ambition. This interpretation is consistent with scholarly examinations of Poe’s late works, which frequently address themes of death and human limitation. Critics have argued that Poe’s writing in the final years of his life reflects a heightened preoccupation with mortality, influenced by personal losses and the fragility of human existence. *Eldorado*, written in 1849, the same year Poe died, appears to affirm this shift. Rather than glorifying perseverance, the poem suggests that true understanding or peace lies beyond material achievement, echoing philosophical ideas about existential reflection and the search for meaning that transcend economic or earthly success.

The analysis shows that Poe’s use of literary devices, including metaphor, symbolism, rhyme, meter, and imagery, plays a fundamental role in reinforcing the poem’s themes. The persistent symbolism of “shadow,” evolving from literal darkness to emotional despair and eventually to a spiritual presence, demonstrates how shifting imagery communicates the psychological transformation of the knight. The poem’s rhyme scheme (aabccb) and iambic dimeter create a repetitive, rhythmic cadence that mirrors the cyclical, unending nature of human ambition. Prior research on Poe’s poetic style has similarly noted that he often relies on sound patterns and musical quality not only for aesthetic effect but to deepen emotional tone and thematic resonance. The rhythmic movement of *Eldorado*: steady, persistent, and ultimately unresolved, reflects the rhythm of the knight’s quest and the futility associated with unattainable goals.

Taken together, these interpretations situate *Eldorado* within a long tradition of literary works that critique the pursuit of material success while emphasizing human limitations. Although the poem draws on historical myths of gold exploration and 19th-century social values surrounding ambition, its philosophical implications remain timeless. In agreement with existing scholarship, the discussion shows that Poe’s poem extends beyond adventure narrative and functions as a moral reflection on the nature of aspiration, disillusionment, and mortality. By merging structural precision with symbolic complexity, *Eldorado* continues to resonate with contemporary readers, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Poe’s poetic insights into the human condition.

The findings of this analysis align with previous scholarly examinations of Poe’s poetic philosophy and thematic concerns. Scholars such as Reynaud (2013), Francseszka-Bianka (2025), Reilly (1974) widely emphasize that Poe’s works frequently revolve around the tension between idealism and inevitable human limitation, a pattern mirrored clearly in *Eldorado*. Nielsen (2014) argues that Poe repeatedly presents protagonists who pursue unattainable ideals, only to encounter existential futility, an observation reflected in the knight’s unwavering but ultimately fruitless quest. By connecting these insights, this study situates the discussion of *Eldorado* within a broader continuum of Poe scholarship, demonstrating that the attitudes toward ambition, mortality, and existential reflection identified in the poem are consistent with wider patterns across Poe’s literary corpus.

#### 4. Conclusion

The analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Eldorado* reveals that the poem functions as an allegory of human aspiration, illustrating the enduring tension between ambition and the inevitability of mortality. Through symbolic imagery, tonal transition, and rhythmic consistency, Poe depicts the knight’s pursuit of the ideal as a metaphor for humanity’s lifelong search for

fulfillment, success, and meaning. The gradual shift from confidence to existential reflection reflects the emotional trajectory that often accompanies ambition across the lifespan. In this way, *Eldorado* not only narrates a quest but also interrogates the psychological and philosophical implications of seeking ideals that remain perpetually out of reach.

The study carries several implications for both scholarship and applied literary interpretation. Academically, the findings reinforce and expand existing discussions on Poe's thematic preoccupation with unattainable ideals and life's limitations, suggesting that *Eldorado* adds valuable dimension to the understanding of aspiration, identity, and mortality within Poe's literary canon. Practically, the poem's symbolic treatment of ambition and resignation may be utilized in literature and humanities education to facilitate discussions on life transitions, emotional resilience, and the pursuit of purpose. Because the poem mirrors universal human experiences, it also offers an interpretive gateway for interdisciplinary analysis, especially in psychology, philosophy, and cultural studies, highlighting literature's relevance in exploring contemporary questions of meaning and personal fulfillment.

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