UC Santa Barbara
Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title
Excerpt from Borges's Poe: The Influence and Reinvention of Edgar Allan Poe in Spanish America

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/92w13666

Journal
Journal of Transnational American Studies, 7(1)

Author
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Publication Date
2016

DOI
10.5070/T871031841

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Borges's Poe



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Borges's Poe

The Influence and Reinvention of Edgar Allan Poe in Spanish America

EMRON ESPLIN

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS *Athens*

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Athens, Georgia 30602
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Set in Sabon MT Pro and Whitney by Graphic Composition, Inc.
Printed and bound by Sheridan
The paper in this book meets the guidelines for
permanence and durability of the Committee on
Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the
Council on Library Resources.

Most University of Georgia Press titles are
available from popular e-book vendors.

Printed in the United States of America
20 19 18 17 16 C 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Esplin, Emron.
Borges's Poe : the influence and reinvention of Edgar
Allan Poe in Spanish America / Emron Esplin.
pages cm — (The New Southern Studies)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8203-4905-3 (hardcover : alk. paper) —
ISBN 978-0-8203-4904-6 (e-book) 1. Poe, Edgar Allan,
1809–1849—Criticism and interpretation—History—
20th century. 2. Borges, Jorge Luis, 1899–1986—Criticism
and interpretation. 3. Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809–1849—
Influence. 4. Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809–1849—Appreciation—
Latin America. I. Title.
PS2637.3.E75 2016
818'.309—dc23 2015023633

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Acknowledgments

For me, this book has been a long but enjoyable adventure—a journey I could not have accomplished without the support of key mentors, friends, family, libraries, and institutions. I need to begin by going back to Michigan State University in the early 2000s and thanking Stephen Arch and María Mudrovcic, whose graduate courses on nineteenth-century U.S. literature and the work of Jorge Luis Borges, respectively, inspired me to write comparative work on Poe and Borges. With their guidance and the encouragement of another MSU professor, Stephen Rachman, I published my first article on Poe and Spanish America and decided that I would return to this topic after finishing my graduate work. A few years and my dissertation—on Faulkner and Fuentes rather than on Borges and Poe—later, I took my first trip to Buenos Aires to begin my research for a book on Poe and Spanish America. That book quickly morphed into a book on Poe and the Río de la Plata region after finding so much material in Buenos Aires. The project changed, again, to focus specifically on Poe and Borges after conducting another pair of research trips to libraries within the United States.

I owe special thanks to the following organizations, libraries, and librarians for their support with *Borges's Poe*. First, thanks to María Kodama and to the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges for allowing me to visit the Fundación on two occasions, for granting me permission to view Borges's marginalia in his personal copies of books by Poe and Hawthorne, and for sharing several stories with me about Borges's works and the latter years of his life. I would also like to thank the Biblioteca Nacional Argentina—especially Laura Rosato, Germán Álvarez, Juan Pablo Canala, and the other librarians in the Sala del Tesoro—for their continual support with this project, both in person during three research trips to the library and via email over the past several years. Thanks to the staffs of the Harry Ransom Center and the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, both at the University of Texas at Austin, for their help while I conducted research in the Ransom's collection of Borges materials and the Benson's collection of Cortázar materials. Thanks, too, to the wonderful librarians in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia for their support while I conducted research in their Jorge Luis Borges Collection. I would like to specifically thank

C. Jared Loewenstein, the founding curator of the Jorge Luis Borges Collection, for talking with me in person, on the phone, and via email about the collection and about Borges the writer and the person. I need to thank Alexander Gilliam, Matthew Kelly, and the Raven Society at the University of Virginia for answering my questions and for sending me lesser-known materials about Poe's relationship with UVA. Finally, I would like to thank the Fundación Torres García and the Museo Torres García for the permission to use Torres García's *América invertida* on my book's cover.

I have researched and written this book while working at two outstanding institutions: Kennesaw State University (KSU) in Kennesaw, Georgia, and Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah. Both institutions funded conference trips where I was able to present parts of this manuscript and receive valuable feedback. KSU also funded my research trips to Buenos Aires, Montevideo, UT Austin, and the University of Virginia through the following awards: a 2009–2010 College of Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Seed Research Award, a 2010–2011 Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Incentive Funding Award for Research and Creative Activity, a 2011 Global Learning Award, and a 2013 College of Humanities and Social Sciences Summer Grant. Without this generous support, *Borges's Poe* would not exist. BYU provided course releases during my first three years on campus that allowed me to craft my book proposal and to finish, revise, and proof my manuscript. BYU also provided funding for the index and the artwork on the book's cover. Classrooms at both KSU and BYU have also been important venues in which I have been able to share my ideas on Borges and Poe with my students and receive their feedback.

I also need to thank the editors and staff at the University of Georgia Press for their support with this book. Special thanks to Jon Smith, one of the New Southern Studies series editors, for showing interest in my work over the years, for contacting me to discuss this book project, and for creating a larger space for inter-American scholarship through his work with Deborah Cohn and through the conferences he has organized around New World studies. Thanks, too, to Walter Biggins, senior acquisitions editor, for answering all my questions throughout this process. I would also like to thank the peer reviewers who offered me both support and valuable feedback in their responses to my book proposal and to the entire manuscript.

I have previously published two chapters from *Borges's Poe*, and I would like to thank the copyright holders for allowing me to republish that work here. Material from "Borges's Philosophy of Poe's Composition," copyright © 2013 by the Pennsylvania State University Press, appears here in my first chapter and in a few paragraphs of my introduction. This article was originally published in *Comparative Literature Studies* 50, issue 3 (2013), and it is used by permission of the Pennsylvania State University Press. A slightly al-

tered version of "Reading and Re-Reading: Jorge Luis Borges's Literary Criticism on Edgar Allan Poe," first published in *Comparative American Studies* 8, issue 4 (2010), makes up my second chapter; it is republished here with permission from Maney Publishing by way of the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc. I have received, from the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, permission to quote from Herbert Weinstock's reviews and rejection slips held in the Alfred A. Knopf Inc. Records at the Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Finally, the Estate of Julio Cortázar has granted me permission to cite an unpublished essay by Cortázar on Roger Caillois that is held at the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin and an unpublished letter from Cortázar to Borges that is held at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia—Julio Cortázar (copyright © 2014 by the Estate of Julio Cortázar).

Many friends and colleagues have offered me constructive criticism on this project. I would like to thank my former writing group at KSU—Katarina Gephardt and Larrie Dudenhoeffer—for helping me revise three of my chapters. Thanks to John Alba Cutler for listening to my thoughts and for offering me new ones. Thanks to Brian Russell Roberts for his help with the book proposal process and for several useful ideas, especially with the epilogue. Thanks to Ashley Nadeau and Sean Ash Gordon for inviting me to present on a panel with them about Poe and empire at the 2012 American Studies Association meeting. Special thanks to Caroline Egan, Margarida Vale de Gato, and Scott Peeples for organizing with me, over the past several years, various seminars on Poe for the American Comparative Literature Association's annual meeting since these seminars have continually provided quality feedback on my work with Poe and Borges. Thanks to Bill Rice (my former chair at KSU), Sarah Robbins, Lois Davis Vines, and Stephen Rachman for writing letters of support at one time or another that helped me obtain the grants and awards that funded my research. Thanks to Richie Essenburg and Todd Frary, who served as my graduate research assistants at KSU during the first years of this project. Thanks, also, to Enid Zafran for the help with the index.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support while I wrote this book. Thanks to my parents, DaLon and Lisa Esplin, for teaching me how to work and for always encouraging my studies. Thanks to Marlene for her patience, for her intelligence, and for her consistent willingness to talk with me about this and other projects, and thanks to Moses, Anya, Ansel, and Edith for making our home both louder and more rewarding than any book project.

A Note on Translation

Throughout *Borges's Poe*, I offer citations of Spanish-language works in Spanish and provide translations of these citations in the text. The vast majority of Borges's fiction and poetry has been translated into English, but only a fraction of his literary criticism has been published in English translation. For Borges's works, I offer my own translations when the particular pieces have not previously been translated into English, and I cite published English translations when they are available. For the works of other Spanish-language writers and critics, I provide my own translations unless otherwise cited.

Borges's Poe

Introduction

Reciprocal Influence

No other U.S. writer has enjoyed the same level of influence on and affinity with Spanish American letters for such a lengthy time period as Edgar Allan Poe. From early and anonymous rewritings/translations of three of his works in a biweekly Peruvian newspaper, *El instructor peruano*, in 1847, when Poe was still alive, to the influence of his detective stories on current crime fiction in Buenos Aires and Mexico City, Poe has maintained both a long-standing and widespread reputation throughout the region. Adored by the *modernistas* at the turn of the twentieth century, respected by the writers of the so-called Latin American Boom, and praised by contemporary or post-Boom authors, Poe's presence in Spanish America has been constant from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. His image and his import, however, shifted during the twentieth century, and this shift is clearly connected to the work of three writers from the Río de la Plata region of South America—Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga and Argentines Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar. *Borges's Poe* focuses on the second author in this trio and argues that Borges, through a sustained and complex literary relationship with Poe's works, served as the primary catalyst that changed Poe's image throughout Spanish America from a poet-prophet to a timeless fiction writer. This book also posits that literary influence runs both ways, since Poe's writings visibly affected Borges the poet, story writer, essayist, and thinker while Borges's analyses and translations of Poe's work and his responses to Poe's texts in his own fiction forever changed how readers of Poe return to his literary corpus.

During his long life, Borges engaged Poe on almost every possible level in both his private and professional lives and became a full rewriter of Poe in the various manners described by translation studies theorist André Lefevere, who claims that translators "have the power to construct the image of one literature for consumption by the readers of another. They share this power with literary historians, anthologizers, and critics. [. . .] Translators, critics, historians, and anthologizers all rewrite texts under similar constraints at the same historical moment. They are image makers, exerting the power of subversion under the guise of objectivity" (6–7). Borges rewrote or re-created

Poe from each of these vantage points. He translated two of Poe's famous short stories—"The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" and "The Purloined Letter"—with his friend and occasional writing partner Adolfo Bioy Casares, and he published these translations in several well-known anthologies that he edited with Bioy Casares and other colleagues. He examined Poe in the literary history he cowrote with Esther Zemborain de Torres, *Introducción a la literatura norteamericana* [*An Introduction to American Literature*], and as a literary critic, he approached Poe in scores of articles, prologues, introductions, interviews, and dialogues. Finally, Borges directly and indirectly conversed with Poe's work in his own fiction and poetry throughout the twentieth century.

Borges began his literary career in the 1920s as a radical poet and a talented literary critic who challenged the aesthetics of the dominant literary movement of the time: Spanish American *modernismo*. Launched by the 1888 publication of *Azul* by Rubén Darío, *modernismo* was primarily a poetic movement concerned with beauty and art for art's sake. Although Darío was Nicaraguan, he spent a significant amount of time in Buenos Aires, and some of *modernismo*'s most important writers hailed from the Río de la Plata region, including Borges's fellow Argentine Leopoldo Lugones. When Borges returned to Buenos Aires in 1921 after a seven-year stay in Europe with his family, the young poet entered a literary climate saturated with thirty years of *modernista* literature, and he almost immediately challenged the norm by attempting to create an Argentine branch of the avant-garde poetic movement he had joined in Spain called *ultraismo*. Young Borges was particularly critical of Lugones, and although Borges's zeal for *ultraismo* soon faded, his disagreements with Lugones and the *modernistas* in general remained visible until much later in his career.[1]

The *modernistas* revered Poe as a poet-prophet, and as John Eugene Englekirk demonstrates in his seminal text on Poe's literary relationship with the Spanish-speaking world from the late nineteenth century to the early 1930s—*Edgar Allan Poe in Hispanic Literature*—this poet-prophet from the north was one of the primary influences on *modernismo*. Englekirk avers that "[i]n Spanish America Poe's fame as a poet has [. . .] long since outdistanced his renown as a writer of tales" (97), and he claims that "[a]lmost all of the followers of Modernism were directly or indirectly influenced by Poe" (146). Englekirk even suggests that Poe's work will never again wield as much influence in the region as it did with the *modernistas:* "[I]nspiration from Poe is by no means a thing of the past. But we must not expect to encounter any such palpable evidence of his influence as has been the case in our study of the Modernistas" (466). Englekirk's study slightly predates Borges's first attempts at fiction, and he only mentions Borges once, calling him a poet who radically departs from the aesthetics of *modernismo* (466). What Englekirk

could not have foretold, however, was that this young poet would eventually transform Poe's reputation in the Río de la Plata region and throughout Spanish-speaking America by completely redefining Poe in his literary criticism as a story writer rather than a poet, by liberally translating and widely disseminating two of Poe's tales, and by responding to Poe in some of his most important short fiction.

Borges was not the first writer in the region to seriously and repeatedly approach Poe's fiction rather than his poetry. That distinction belongs to Horacio Quiroga, who published multiple Poe-like stories and openly claimed Poe as one of his revered literary models. The first rule in Quiroga's "Decálogo del perfecto cuentista," which he published in the pages of the Buenos Aires literary journal *Babel* in 1927, demands, "Cree en un maestro—Poe, Maupassant, Kipling, Chejov—como en Dios mismo" ["Believe in a master—Poe, Maupassant, Kipling, Chekhov—as in God himself"], and his fifth rule closely resembles Poe's own ideas on effect: "No empieces a escribir sin saber desde la primera palabra adónde vas. En un cuento bien logrado, las tres primeras líneas tienen casi la importancia de las tres últimas" ["Do not begin to write without knowing from the first word where you are going. In a well done story, the first three lines are almost as important as the last three"] (86–87).[2] Quiroga's fiction, with its horror, naturalism, and regional color, often deviates from *modernismo*'s aesthetics, but his career coincided with *modernismo* rather than challenging the movement. Indeed, Quiroga had a long-lasting relationship with *modernismo*. His first major publication, a short collection of poems titled *Los arrecifes de coral*, was a *modernista* endeavor, several of his close friends were well-known *modernista* writers, and he first discovered the jungle that came to dominate his life and his writing while traveling as Lugones's photographer.[3] As Englekirk argues, Quiroga was one of the most important fiction writers of both the Río de la Plata region and Spanish-speaking America by the early 1930s, and his fiction "inspired and guided" several of the "younger prose writers" in the region (368). However, Quiroga's work did not change the way his friends and contemporaries read Poe and understood his image.[4] Poe remained for the *modernistas* the melancholy bard with the tragic biography. Borges's literary criticism, his Poe translations, and his fiction first delicately and then blatantly challenged Poe's place as a poet and as a muse for the *modernistas* by emphasizing Poe's favoring of reason over inspiration and by focusing almost exclusively on Poe's prose while either ignoring or disparaging his poetry.

Borges's Poe carves out a unique space at the intersection between U.S. literary studies, Latin American literary studies, the specializations of Poe studies and Borges scholarship within the aforementioned traditions, and the field of comparative literature—a space that allows both Borges and Poe to function

as literary protagonists whose work reciprocally influences one another. Poe scholars have long acknowledged the debt that Poe's current global and domestic reputations owe to his nineteenth- and twentieth-century advocates in France, but the field usually downplays the influence that subsequent writers from other literary and linguistic traditions have on Poe in favor of recounting the influence Poe has on the writers of these traditions. This tendency merely repeats at the microcosmic level the favoritism that U.S. (and British) texts often receive in comparative scholarship published in English, and it has created a negative effect among many scholars of Latin American literatures who see attempts at comparative literary scholarship in the Americas (whether performed by Americanists who define American literature as U.S. literature or by scholars who have embraced the transnational turn in American Studies) as academic imperialism, a disciplinary invasion in which English departments occupy the territory of Latin American literature.[5] Ironically, Poe studies as typically practiced in Spanish also fetishizes Poe as influence rather than confronting what Spanish American writers have done with/to Poe.

Over the past thirty years, however, several literary critics in various traditions have juxtaposed Borges's and Poe's oeuvres in a more even-handed manner that emphasizes the stature of each writer rather than treating Poe as source and Borges as receptacle.[6] The most notable work in this field of Borges/Poe scholarship includes Maurice J. Bennett's article "The Detective Fiction of Poe and Borges," which offers one of the earliest comparative readings of Borges's famous story "La muerte y la brújula" ["Death and the Compass"] alongside Poe's Dupin trilogy, and John T. Irwin's interdisciplinary tour de force, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story*, which examines everything from chess theory to Greek mythology and from psychoanalysis to advanced mathematics to reveal Borges's centennial doubling of the Dupin tales with his own trio of detective stories. Most Borges/Poe scholarship, including the work of Bennett and Irwin, focuses primarily on the fiction of each author while only occasionally referring to their critical writings, and the vast majority of these publications revolve around the detective genre itself while leaving other themes and issues from each writer's fiction and their literary criticism in general on the periphery of the conversation.[7] Furthermore, works that couple Borges and Poe typically avoid specific discussions of either author's particular American context. Much Borges/Poe scholarship—especially the scholarship available in English—reads Borges as a world writer reacting to Poe as both a precursor and a literary peer while deemphasizing the cultural context in which Borges interprets Poe.

Borges's Poe avoids the paternalistic approach of some Poe studies scholarship, in both English and Spanish, and the imperialistic specter of some comparative American literary studies by emphasizing Borges's role in the Borges/

Poe relationship. This book engages and expands the conversations in current Borges/Poe scholarship by exploring the connections between Borges's and Poe's literary criticism, by analyzing Borges's Poe translations and his success anthologizing those translations, and by examining several of each writer's nondetective stories. This study also approaches archival materials that have received little to no coverage in other Borges/Poe scholarship, including the handwritten notes Borges made in his personal copies of various editions of Poe's works. Finally, *Borges's Poe* emphasizes the spatial and temporal context in which Borges interprets Poe—the Río de la Plata region from the 1920s through the 1980s—because Borges's influence on Poe's reputation occurs in and is most significant for this specific time and space. Although Borges first read Poe in English rather than Spanish or French, he offered his interpretations of Poe (particularly the readings he provided before 1961, when his reception of the Formentor Prize in France launched him onto the global stage) to *porteño*, national, and regional audiences in Buenos Aires's largest daily newspapers, *La Nación* and *La Prensa*, and in important weeklies such as *El Hogar*; and he delivered similar thoughts to a broader Spanish American audience in the literary magazine *Sur*.[8] In short, Borges's recasting of Poe is both local and transnational. His literary criticism, translations, and fiction alter Poe's image at national (Argentina), regional (Río de la Plata), and hemispheric (from Mesoamerica to the Southern Cone) levels, and to understand this shift in Poe's reputation, *Borges's Poe* highlights Borges's place as a national and regional writer who eventually becomes a global figure rather than simply juxtaposing Borges and Poe as two icons in the canon of world literature.

Borges, Poe, the Souths, and Southernness

Borges's Poe also refocuses inter-American or hemispheric American literary studies and the New Southern Studies by concentrating specifically on the direct literary relationship between Borges and Poe. Over the past two decades, the majority of monographs in these fields have offered analyses of shared histories or similar traumatic experiences between writers of disparate national and literary traditions.[9] For example, several important titles that bring a hemispheric perspective to the New Southern Studies—including George Handley's and Deborah Cohn's first books, *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas* and *History and Memory in the Two Souths*, respectively, Cohn's and Jon Smith's coedited volume *Look Away!*, and more recent books like Elizabeth Christine Russ's *The Plantation in the Postslavery Imagination*—all ground their comparative readings of U.S. southern, Latin American, and Caribbean literatures on a shared history of slavery, the pervasiveness of the plantation system, and/or the common experiences of defeat, occupation,

and poverty that, as C. Vann Woodward argues in *The Burden of Southern History*, separate the U.S. South from the U.S. North and connect the U.S. South to most other regions and peoples.[10] To be sure, tracing these shared experiences across geopolitical and linguistic borders justifies the comparisons these critics make between disparate authors and literary traditions and avoids the type of disciplinary cannibalism that some Latin Americanists fear from comparative literary studies in the Americas, but the ubiquity of this stance in recent hemispheric scholarship obfuscates the direct connections that exist between certain writers.

Adopting this type of approach could also work for a project on Borges and Poe since both writers identify as southern in one form or fashion; however, calling Poe and Borges "southerners" reveals the shifting nature of regional terminology when approaching the study of literature or history from a hemispheric vantage point, highlighting how markers of place and the cultural connotations that may accompany them are always relative to the position of the person passing judgment. Both Poe and Borges are and are not southern writers in the geographical and cultural senses of the term. Geographically, Poe was raised in Richmond, Virginia—the northeast corner of what is typically defined as the U.S. South, although the city's latitude is fairly central on a national map, but a northern city when viewed from a hemispheric viewpoint. Culturally, Poe is often identified as a southern writer. Indeed, some of Poe's biographers, both from inside and outside the United States, see his childhood in a U.S. southern town as a key to his future literary output. For example, Hervey Allen identifies Poe as a southerner and speculates that he must have spent significant time listening to the stories told by slaves in the home of his guardian, John Allan, or in the slave cabins on the plantation. These narratives, Allen suggests, created a fascination with death and burial that dominates much of Poe's fiction (49–50). Julio Cortázar, citing Allen as one of his primary sources, also calls Poe a southerner in his short Poe biography, claiming that "creció como sureño, pese a su nacimiento en Boston, y jamás dejó de serlo en espíritu" ["he grew up as a southerner, in spite of his birth in Boston, and he never stopped being one in spirit"] (22). However, as Allen notes, many readers and critics ignore Poe's southern youth (49). For these readers, Poe's birth in Boston, his five-year stint as a child in England, his adult life in the largest cities of the eastern U.S. seaboard, and/or the proclivities he reveals in his works trump his early years in Richmond, his brief studies at the University of Virginia, and his views on slavery and aristocracy. For example, Borges, dissenting with Baudelaire and others who read Poe as "accidental en América" ["accidental in America"] ("Una vindicación" 13), goes so far as to claim: "No solo americano sino *yankee*, es el terrible y humorístico Poe: ya en la continua precisión y practicidad de sus variados juegos con la tiniebla, con las escrituras secretas y con el verso, ya en las ráfagas de

enorme charlatanería que recuerdan a Barnum" ["Not only American, but *Yankee*, is the terrible and humorous Poe: whether in the continual precision and practicality of his varied games with darkness, with secret writings, and with verse, or whether in the bursts of enormous charlatanism that recall Barnum"] (13–14). Finally, neither Borges nor Cortázar mentions, probably because such commentary would seem obvious to them and to their readers in the Río de la Plata region, that Poe's southernness or lack thereof carries a completely different connotation than when the same marker is used to describe someone in Argentina.

Borges's southernness is equally problematic. Geographically, he lived in one of the southernmost metropoles in the Americas—Buenos Aires—but his personal and Argentina's national perspective do not include Buenos Aires (at least not the neighborhoods in which Borges lived) in what they call "*el* sur" [*the* South]. Culturally, Borges both wrote for and edited the prestigious literary journal *Sur*, and one of his most famous short stories—a tale that is often read autobiographically—carries the title "El sur" ["The South"].[11] Also, Borges's literary career began to blossom in the mid-1930s at the same time that Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García (recently returned to Montevideo after decades abroad) was calling, first to Uruguayans and then to other South Americans, for a southern school of art, claiming "*nuestro norte es el Sur*" ["*our north is the South*"] ("La escuela" 193, italics in original).[12] In contrast, although he consistently identified as Argentine—both in moments of pride and moments of shame—Borges always disconnected Argentina and himself from the so-called Latin America. He was an anglophile fascinated with British and U.S. histories and literatures, loved the English language, and occasionally lamented what he saw as his calling as a Spanish-language writer. Like Poe, he was and was not a southerner.

Apart from the contested southern identities of both Borges and Poe, comparing Borges's and Poe's souths also runs the risk of glossing over significant historical and political differences. Both authors are not only connected to *a* South but to a distinct *the* South—one that begins at the Mason-Dixon line and another that begins, according to Borges's character Juan Dahlmann, on the "otro lado de Rivadavia" ["other side of Avenida Rivadavia"] ("El sur" 525; "The South" 176) in Buenos Aires—and the histories of these two particular souths are not as similar as the histories of the U.S. South, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Brazil. Indeed, Argentina's history, with its frontier narrative of civilization versus barbarity, its policies that pushed indigenous peoples out of the civilized space rather than mixing with them, its relatively low number of slaves of African descent compared to its neighbor and rival Brazil, and its massive waves of European immigration, has much more in common with the history of the U.S. North and/or the history of the broader United States than it does with the history of the U.S. South.

In short, Borges's and Poe's southernness and the connections and/or disparities between the U.S. South, Argentina, and the broader United States lie outside the parameters and goals of this book, but that is not to say that *Borges's Poe* devalues inter-American scholarship that focuses on shared experience across borders. Rather, this book advocates for giving renewed attention to the literal/literary relationships between writers in the American hemisphere by analyzing Borges's and Poe's works and demonstrating how they impact each other through a complex literary relationship of two-way influence.[13] Instead of mapping out a shared or not-so-shared history between Poe's U.S. southern experience (or even Poe's U.S. experience) and Borges's life in Argentina, *Borges's Poe* explores the literary connection created between these two authors when Borges reads and incorporates Poe's work into his own, and it examines the impact of Borges's interpretations of Poe's literature and his reshaping of Poe's image within the national, regional, and hemispheric contexts of Argentina, the Río de la Plata region, and Spanish-speaking America.[14] My approach fits under what Gustavo Pérez Firmat once called the "*genetic*" method in his introduction to *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* (3), but it grants importance to the context behind Borges's and Poe's relationship, to the time and space in which Borges interpreted Poe, in a manner more similar to Pérez Firmat's descriptions of the "*generic*" and "*appositional*" modes (3–4, italics in original). In short, *Borges's Poe* is an influence study, but an influence study that emphasizes that literary influence is both multifaceted and contextual.

Borges, Bloom, and the Concept of Two-Way Influence

Borges, like Quiroga before him, discovered Poe's work at an early age and returned to Poe's texts often. Unlike Quiroga, however, Borges's literary relationship with Poe existed first outside of and then in spite of Spanish American *modernismo* and this movement's infatuation with Poe as tragic poet. In his "Autobiographical Notes," which Borges and Norman Thomas di Giovanni published in the *New Yorker* in 1970, Borges claims, "[i]f I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library" (42). Borges found Poe on the shelves of that library, and as a young boy, he first read Poe in English (42).[15] In two different dialogues with Osvaldo Ferrari, Borges suggests that he was purposefully morose as a youth because he wanted to be a Hamlet, a Poe, a Baudelaire, or a Byron ("La ética y la cultura" 268; "Sobre la personalidad y el Buda" 160). More important than this contrived attitude of youthful melancholy, Poe's influence reveals itself at various stages of Borges's writing and teaching careers, including Borges's penchant for detective fiction, his work as a literature teacher, and his preference for rereading rather than reading. Borges first called Poe the inventor of the de-

tective genre in 1933 ("Leyes de la narración policial" 36–37; "Una sentencia del *Quijote*" 64), eight years before he published his first detective story—"El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" ["The Garden of Forking Paths"]—nine years before he and Adolfo Bioy Casares released their collection of detective parodies, *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* [*Six Problems for Isidro Parodi*], and a decade before translating "The Purloined Letter" as "La carta robada" with Bioy Casares for their anthology *Los mejores cuentos policiales*. Borges taught Poe as one of nine U.S. writers during his first teaching stint as "a teacher of English literature at the Asociación Argentina de Cultura Inglesa" ("Autobiographical" 85) in the mid-1940s after losing his municipal library post due to his criticism of Argentina's president Juan Perón, and he discussed Poe's life and his works in his and Zemborain de Torres's textbook-like *Introducción a la literatura norteamericana*. He spoke about Poe in various public settings throughout his career, including his well-known lectures collected in *Siete noches* [*Seven Nights*] and *Borges, oral*.[16] Finally, Borges claimed to have read and reread Poe up until the last years of his life.

Borges's early access and perennial returns to Poe cannot be overstated; however, any study on Borges and Poe must decide how best to tackle the complex concept of influence. The time-tried model of the influence study offers a one-way approach to influence by mapping the effects of an earlier writer or literary tradition on a later author or tradition. As previously mentioned, Pérez Firmat calls influence studies "*genetic*" and lists this approach as one of four methods for conducting inter-American literary research (3, italics in original). He moves beyond a simplistic understanding of influence by suggesting that a genetic critique not only uncovers literary or literal markers of influence but also analyzes these points of contact to elaborate on how later writers use the work of their forerunners for their own ends (3). However, Pérez Firmat's own terminology cuts against his definition since the biological baggage of the term "genetic" implies that a former writer passes literary traits down to a later author, regardless of the will of the second writer. The term itself suggests that the later writer relies on the former author to exist in the first place, that the influenced writer is his or her predecessor's offspring.

Pérez Firmat doubly responds to Harold Bloom's famous treatise *The Anxiety of Influence* by simultaneously arguing that later writers demonstrate agency in their usage of the works of former authors while labeling this same relationship in genetic terms that underline the concepts of literary parents and offspring that are essential to Bloom's theory. In a study solely on Poe, we could, and perhaps should, disregard Bloom's text since his well-known dislike for Poe—as seen in his scathing introductions to *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe* and *Bloom's Classic Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe*—leaves few, if any, reasons for approaching Poe from a Bloomian perspective. In short, why use Poe's literature to question or sustain Bloom's

theory when Bloom himself sees Poe as unworthy of serious study?[17] Furthermore, Bloom's theory of influence—itself highly influential, especially during the 1970s and 1980s—appears to have run its course, and scholarship that grapples with Bloom's theory risks appearing passé. This debate, however, is crucial for *Borges's Poe* for three reasons. First, Bloom's theory on influence, regardless of the fact that it has now fallen out of style, was the most prominent theorization of the concept during the twentieth century. Second, the concept of influence has still not recovered any of the positive connotation that it held before Bloom—it continues to connote competition, anxiety, and negative debt in the mind of most literary critics. Third (and most important), Bloom's entire theory is a misreading of Borges's thoughts on influence in "Kafka y sus precursores."

The Anxiety of Influence performs exactly what it claims to be theorizing. The later poet or theorist, Bloom, willfully misreads Borges's famous essay on influence, "Kafka y sus precursores" ["Kafka and His Precursors"], for his own ends and concludes with the Borgesian thought that John Milton's poetry demonstrates William Wordsworth's influence or that Walt Whitman's works reveal the influence of Hart Crane (154) only to openly state that the "*apophrades*," or the last step in the process of influence in his model, is something different from Borges's idea "that artists *create* their precursors, as for instance the Kafka of Borges creates the Browning of Borges" (141, italics in original). Bloom begins the book with a nod to Borges in the first two sentences of the opening chapter: "Shelly speculated that poets of all ages contributed to one Great Poem perpetually in progress. Borges remarks that poets create their precursors" (19); he then offers a lengthy, six-step description of influence as an oedipal struggle between later writers and their precursors that serves as a creative misreading and rewriting of Borges's conceptualization of influence; and he concludes that the last step of the process makes the precursors' work appear "as though the later poet himself had written" it (16). These last words sound very much like Borges's thoughts in the Kafka essay, but as I mentioned briefly above, Bloom openly sets out "to distinguish the phenomenon from the witty insight of Borges" (141) and, in doing so, performs the very apophrades he claims to be analyzing by making a statement in Borges's terms that now appear to be Bloom's. In short, Bloom's text *is* an example of the very concept he sets out to examine. One could argue that such an ontological performance actually strengthens his theory—that performing the theory while creating it helps to demonstrate its value—but Bloom's version of Borges's concept of influence appears much less radical and less attractive when read alongside Borges's Kafka essay.

The Anxiety of Influence, as its very title suggests, brings an anxiety to the concept of influence that Borges openly denounces in "Kafka y sus precursores." In this essay, Borges claims to see Kafka's influence in the works of at

least six writers who predate Kafka—Zeno's paradox as described by Aristotle, a ninth-century Chinese fable by Han Yu, the works of Søren Kierkegaard, "Fears and Scruples" by Robert Browning, *Histoires désobligeantes* by Léon Bloy, and "Carcassonne" by Lord Dunsany ("Kafka" 107–09; "Kafka" 363–65). Borges solves this anachronistic conundrum by suggesting that Kafka influences these pieces by influencing Borges the reader, that a later writer "*crea* a sus precursores" ["*creates* his precursors"] (109; 365, emphasis in original) by affecting the minds of his or her readers so that when they read older texts, they take their previous readings of newer texts into the experience with them and thus find remnants or strains of the newer texts in the older writings.[18] He states that the writer's "labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro" (109) ["work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future"] (365).[19] This modification, however, is not competitive or self-aggrandizing: "En el vocabulario crítico, la palabra *precursor* es indispensable, pero habría que tratar de purificarla de toda connotación de polémica o de rivalidad" (109, Borges's italics) ["The word 'precursor' is indispensable to the vocabulary of criticism, but one must try to purify it from any connotation of polemic or rivalry"] (365). Borges's descriptions of the precursor-successor relationship disallow the very competition that undergirds Bloom's theory of influence, and although this contradiction remains unspoken in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom openly admits as much when he returns to the subject of influence almost forty years later in *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life*.[20] In this 2011 text, Bloom recalls Borges's Kafka essay and states: "Sadly, Borges idealized his account of literary influence by rejecting any idea of rivalry or competition in regard to precursors" (25). That Bloom laments the lack of struggle that Borges calls the key to the understanding of influence emphasizes his theory's divergence from Borges's and clarifies why I follow the latter in *Borges's Poe*. It makes little sense to couch a study on the relationship of influence between Poe and Borges as an oedipal struggle, not only because such an approach would place Poe's work within the rubric of a literary critic who flatly rejects him in favor of Emerson and Whitman, but also because Borges's critical and fictional writings demonstrate that his relationship with Poe is not one of rivalry.[21] Their affiliation is, instead, a complex relationship in which the former writer, Poe, clearly affects the latter writer, Borges, who, in turn, influences his precursor by altering his reputation and changing the way modern readers approach his work. In short, the Poe/Borges relationship exemplifies both the typical and the uncanny influence Borges describes in his Kafka essay.

If Borges did have an oedipal relationship with a group of writers, it was with the *modernistas*—particularly fellow Argentine Leopoldo Lugones. One could argue that Borges's involvement in *ultraismo*, his early critiques of Lugones, and his eventual praise for Lugones and the *modernistas* in his

middle and old age—when they were no longer a literary threat to him—demonstrate Bloom's theory of influence. The *modernistas* revered Poe as a poet, and their hyperbolic sentiments were best captured in "Los raros" when Rubén Darío called Poe

> un sublime apasionado, un nervioso, uno de esos divinos semilocos necesarios para el progreso humano, lamentables cristos del arte, que por amor al eterno ideal tienen su calle de la amargura, sus espinas y su cruz. Nació con la adorable llama de la poesía, y ella le alimentaba al propio tiempo que era su martirio.
>
> [a passionate sublime being, a nervous man, one of those divine partially madmen necessary for human progress, lamentable Christs of art who for the love of an eternal ideal have their *via dolorosa*, their thorns, and their cross. He was born with the adorable flame of poetry, and she nurtured him at the same time that she was his martyrdom.] (267)

Borges overtly challenges the *modernistas*' portrayal of Poe as poet-prophet by praising Poe as a writer of fiction. His reinterpretation of Poe recalls Irwin's discussion of Jacques Derrida's move to "one up" Jacques Lacan by offering a different reading of Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (*Mystery* 3–5). Just as Derrida seeks to show the problems with psychoanalysis by contradicting Lacan's interpretation of "The Purloined Letter" from his famous 1956 reading of the story, perhaps Borges renames Poe to reveal an inherent problem at the origins of *modernismo*—that the movement has misidentified its own icon. That Borges may have used Poe as a way to challenge *modernismo* is not unlikely; however, unlike Derrida, whom Irwin claims "is motivated less by an interest in Poe or 'The Purloined Letter' than by a desire to score points off Lacan" (4), Borges was already invested in Poe long before his debates with the *modernistas* even began. Borges's early access to Poe in English suggests that his literary relationship with Poe exists before, and possibly outside, his competitive relationship with the *modernistas*. In any case, Borges's relationship with Poe lacks both the aggressive edge that remains visible in his relationship with the *modernistas* and the oedipal angst necessary for a Bloomian interpretation of influence.

In *Borges's Poe*, I argue that influence runs both ways rather than following the trickle-down theory of influence inherent in Pérez Firmat's use of the label "genetic" to describe influence studies or the model of oedipal struggle as described in Bloom's theory. *Borges's Poe* reveals that Poe's literature influences Borges the young reader and Borges the author, not only in Borges's detective fiction where Poe's influence has been repeatedly highlighted by other scholars and by Borges himself, but also in more surprising places, like his cerebral short story "El Aleph." Borges, in turn, influences both Poe's reputation and Poe's fiction itself. Borges reframes Poe's image through his own

literary criticism and his Poe translations, and he changes how Poe's readers return to Poe's stories through his own short fiction. Borges's Kafka essay is particularly relevant in the latter case. The final paragraph of "Kafka y sus precursores" creates a radical, early type of reader-response criticism that illuminates the way Borges's fiction affects Poe's. After describing the six sources he identifies as Kafka precursors, Borges claims:

> Si no me equivoco, las heterogéneas piezas que he enumerado se parecen a Kafka; si no me equivoco, no todas se parecen entre sí. Este último hecho es el más significativo. En cada uno de esos textos está la idiosincrasia de Kafka, en grado mayor o menor, pero si Kafka no hubiera escrito, no la percibiríamos; vale decir, no existiría. El poema "Fears and Scruples" de Robert Browning profetiza la obra de Kafka, pero nuestra lectura de Kafka afina y desvía sensiblemente nuestra lectura del poema. Browning no lo leía como ahora nosotros lo leemos. [. . .] El hecho es que cada escritor *crea* a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro. (109)

> [If I am not mistaken, the heterogeneous pieces I have listed resemble Kafka; if I am not mistaken, not all of them resemble each other. This last fact is what is most significant. Kafka's idiosyncracy is present in each of these writings, to a greater or lesser degree, but if Kafka had not written, we would not perceive it; that is to say, it would not exist. The poem "Fears and Scruples" by Robert Browning prophesies the work of Kafka, but our reading of Kafka noticeably refines and diverts our reading of the poem. Browning did not read it as we read it now. [. . .] The fact is that each writer *creates* his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future.] (365)

According to Borges, the successor creates the precursor in two ways, or the reader feels the presence of the later writer in the work of the former author on two levels. On the first level, the reader experiences an odd, anachronistic sensation that the work they are reading was written by an author who postdates the publication of the text. In the context of *Borges's Poe*, passages from Poe's "Loss of Breath" seem Borgesian to the Poe reader who is familiar with Borges's "Funes el memorioso." On the second level, the reader returns to a work she has read before and sees it with new eyes because she has been affected by a piece or a body of work she has read by a more contemporary writer. For example, Poe readers reinterpret the revenge plots from "Metzengerstein" and "The Black Cat" if they reread those stories after having read Borges's "El Aleph." Level two goes beyond feeling that a text resembles the work of a later writer, changing the rereading of a piece even if that text does not produce the anachronistic feeling created in level one. For example, "The Black Cat" does not feel Borgesian, even if the Poe reader is familiar with "El Aleph"; instead, this reader questions the possibility of a just re-

venge that "The Black Cat" offers after seeing revenge fail in Borges's tale. In short, the concept of two-way influence that I follow in *Borges's Poe* reiterates the importance of Poe's influence on Borges, but more importantly, it reveals (1) how Borges takes Poe's influence, along with the influence of scores of other writers in a number of languages, and tweaks it for his own ends and (2) how Borges's texts alter our understanding of works we have read and reread by Poe.

I have organized *Borges's Poe* into three sections, with each part focusing on a distinct role Borges played in shifting Poe's reputation in the American hemisphere. The first section, "Renaming Poe: Jorge Luis Borges's Literary Criticism on Edgar Allan Poe," examines how Borges reshaped Poe's image through a decades-long return to Poe and his work in both oral and written literary criticism. Borges referred to Poe in solo-authored articles, essays, and prologues over 130 times between his first written reference to Poe in 1923 and his last approaches to Poe in 1986, the year of Borges's death. He also mentioned Poe in several of his collaborative works of literary criticism and in scores of interviews and dialogues in both Spanish and English. The sheer number of references and their continual appearance during more than sixty years of Borges's writing career demonstrate both Poe's lasting influence on Borges as a writer and thinker and Borges's profound influence on how Poe is read and interpreted in the Río de la Plata region and across Spanish America during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. This section expands Borges/Poe scholarship by engaging Borges's literary criticism rather than focusing solely on the fiction (or, more particularly, the detective fiction) of each writer. It challenges the paternalistic approach of some Poe scholarship by examining Borges's position as a Poe reader and interpreter—his role as a critical lens that altered Poe's poetic reputation in Spanish America and, ultimately, recast Poe as a timeless fiction writer. Finally, this section reminds inter-American and New Southern Studies scholars that, along with the shared histories, experiences, or trauma that can bring the works of two writers into the same critical conversation, individual authors often transverse borders by reading, responding to, and re-creating one another.[22]

Chapter 1, "Borges's Philosophy of Poe's Composition," reveals how Borges perennially interprets Poe's most famous analytic essay, "The Philosophy of Composition," as detective fiction in order to downplay Poe's role as a poet and increase his visibility as the inventor of the detective genre. This chapter reads "The Philosophy of Composition" as a theory for writing fiction, and it engages Borges's 1935 article—"La génesis de 'El cuervo' de Poe"—to demonstrate how Poe's Dupin trilogy enacts his theory far better than the theoretical essay itself. Borges shows his attraction to Poe's desire to disclose the workings of the writer's mind by making a handwritten note

in his 1927 Johnson edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*—"elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought"—a direct quote from Poe's essay. Poe never actually provides this promised glimpse into the creative-analytic mind in his theoretical texts, but Borges finds a satisfactory depiction of this mental process in Poe's creation of the original analytic detective—C. Auguste Dupin. This thought process is particularly visible in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in which Dupin's thought sequences while solving the original locked-room conundrum and while reading the narrator's mind in the story's analytical introduction are more "elaborate and vacillating" than the simplistic trail of ideas Poe offers to connect his need to repeat the word "Nevermore" and his arrival at the raven as the speaker of the refrain. The chapter also examines Borges's descriptions of his own writing process to show how he consistently performs intellectual tricks espoused by Poe—for example, the hiding of an object in plain sight—while professing that the muse, rather than the intellect, serves as his creative spark. Finally, this chapter shows how Borges openly reframed Poe in 1949 by criticizing his poetry and praising his fiction, and it argues that Borges's campaign to alter Poe's image found resonance with other literary critics in Argentina during the 1940s and began to shift Poe's long-standing reputation throughout the Río de la Plata region.

"Reading and Rereading," the book's second chapter, approaches Borges's preference for rereading over initial reading, and it highlights Poe as one of the authors whom Borges reread from his childhood until his death. The chapter focuses on what could be called Borges's secondary Poe criticism—the scores of book reviews, prologues for other writers' books, and articles on authors other than Poe—in which Borges mentions Poe. In almost every case, Borges describes Poe as either the inventor of the detective genre or as the creator of *Pym*. In the first instance, he continually frames his discussions of twentieth-century detective fiction via Poe and invites his audience to reread Poe, either literally or via memory, each time they read a contemporary detective novel. Borges's insistence on Poe as creator of the genre led to a printed dispute in the 1940s between Borges and Roger Caillois, Borges's eventual French advocate in the 1950s and the person most responsible for Borges's winning of the Formentor Prize in 1961, the prize that cast him onto an international stage, opened his work up for extensive translation into English, and moved Borges from a member of the regional literati to a global literary icon. This chapter examines several rejection slips for proposed translations of Borges's fiction into English from the Knopf publishing house in the 1940s and 1950s, and it argues that Caillois's decision not to seek revenge on Borges, not to take upon himself the role of Dupin or Red Scharlach, has a remarkable impact on Borges's career, bringing his work to French- and English-speaking audiences and launching him onto the world literary scene. The final section of the chapter examines Borges's unlikely fascination with Poe's *The Narra-*

tive of Arthur Gordon Pym and suggests that Borges embraces this novel, even though he almost universally prefers short fiction to novels and continually critiques Poe for the type of overbearing prose that *Pym* contains, because he reads the later chapters as their own story—a detective story. Borges claims that while this novel has a primary plotline, the adventures and hardships Pym faces at sea, it also contains a secondary plot, a mystery around the vilification of whiteness. Borges reads and rereads *Pym*'s later chapters as a detective narrative in which the reader solves this hidden mystery. Through this reading, Borges reiterates the same message that he sends with each of his reviews, prologues, and articles on detective fiction: Poe remains important, not due to his poetry, but because he created the most widespread genre of fiction the world has ever seen.

This monograph's second section, "Translating Poe: Jorge Luis Borges's Edgar Allan Poe Translations," sits in the middle of the book and serves as a bridge between Borges's literary criticism and his fiction. This section fills a gap in Borges/Poe scholarship and a void in current inter-American literary criticism by interrogating translation as theory and as practice and by revealing the image-altering work that Borges performs on Poe when he translates Poe's fiction. Apart from a few select pages in Efraín Kristal's *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*, Borges/Poe critics and translation studies scholars have said precious little about Borges's translations of Poe's prose. This silence is symptomatic of a current blind spot in hemispheric literary studies and American Studies scholarship in general after the transnational turn in the field. Scholars are trained to read texts in multiple languages, and Borges, a true polyglot, read from several literary traditions in their source languages. However, the majority of Borges's Spanish-speaking readers (and, on the macro level, the majority of any readership in any particular language in the Americas) access Poe—or any other foreign-language writer—via translation. This section sheds light on a process that often remains in the shadows of academic discourse or is simply taken for granted.

Chapter 3, "Theory, Practice, and *Pym*," analyzes Borges's theory of translation, his role in the current field of translation studies, and how he begins to put his translation theory into practice in his translations of two fragments from *Pym*, Poe's only published novel. Borges honed his theory of translation in a trio of essays he published on the subject from 1926 through 1936. In each essay, he prefers literary or creative translations over literal translations, and he openly challenges the concept of fidelity. Borges further complicates the idea of fidelity in his masterful "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" ["Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"] and completely deflates the concept in his 1943 article on William Beckford's *Vathek*. Borges's translations of two fragments from *Pym*, the first published in his famous essay "El arte narrativo y la magia" ["Narrative Art and Magic"] and the second published in both of

Borges's coauthored anthologies on fantastical creatures, are quite conservative compared to his longer Poe translations. They hint, however, at Borges's willingness to streamline a text in translation and at his ability to make a significant change in a text by only shifting one word. In the first fragment, Borges reduces, by nearly half, the word count from Poe's description of the multiveined water that Pym and his companions discover on an island in the Antarctic while maintaining the passage's sense of awe and possible magic. In the second piece, Borges offers a nearly literal translation of Pym's description of the carcass of a white animal he finds in the water, but his specific diction subtly casts the passage in terms of detective fiction. This translation, like Borges's rereadings of *Pym* examined in chapter 2, underscores Poe's position as creator of the detective genre.

"Facts and an Envelope," the book's fourth chapter, examines Borges's translations of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" and "The Purloined Letter" alongside Poe's source texts and two other significant Argentine translations. This pair of translations clearly demonstrates how Borges's translation practice usually follows his theory. In both cases, he liberally translates Poe's works, streamlining the prose and altering significant plot details at will. His translation of "Valdemar" stresses the believability of mesmerism's temporary power over death, and his translation of "The Purloined Letter" deemphasizes the source text's focus on the object hidden in plain sight to highlight the intellectual duel between Dupin and the minister. In the translations of both "Valdemar" and "The Purloined Letter," Borges makes significant changes to the story's plotlines, which create new Poe stories that are Borges's as much as they are Poe's. Chapter 4 also reminds us that what is at stake in Borges's Poe translations, like his literary criticism on Poe, is the triangulated relationship between Borges, Poe, and the *modernistas*, not just the direct relationship between Borges and Poe. In short, Borges's Poe translations recast Poe as a fiction writer and strip him of his sacred garb as the *modernistas*' poet-prophet.

The third section of *Borges's Poe*, "Rewriting Poe: Jorge Luis Borges's Poe-Influenced and Poe-Influencing Short Fiction," reiterates the multifaceted nature of the literary influence between Borges and Poe by offering two chapters of comparative analysis that revolve around three Poe tales—"Loss of Breath," "Metzengerstein," and "The Black Cat"—and two Borges stories, "Funes el memorioso" ["Funes, His Memory"] and "El Aleph," that have not been juxtaposed in previous Borges/Poe criticism. This section, once again, moves the conversation about Poe and Borges beyond the detective genre, which has received so much coverage in Borges/Poe scholarship; emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the influence between the two writers rather than casting Poe as singular influence and Borges as passive receptor; and offers the type of paired readings that have been lacking in recent inter-American and

New Southern Studies scholarship—readings based on the literary relationship between Borges and Poe rather than on the historical or regional connections between the two spaces from which both authors wrote.

Chapter 5, "Buried Connections," unearths significant links between Poe's lesser-known tale "Loss of Breath" and Borges's famous stories "Funes el memorioso" and "El Aleph." Borges buries the most important connections between these stories three times over. First, his texts talk back to passages in Poe's story that Poe deleted before republishing "Loss of Breath" for the third time in 1846. Second, Borges only alludes to Poe's story indirectly in his literary criticism. And third, Borges hides this veiled allusion within a postscript to a republished prologue. "Buried Connections" demonstrates how particular descriptions of Ireneo Funes's amazing memory and specific items in the list of what Borges's narrator sees in the infinite Aleph spring directly from Poe's narrator's account of the sensations he suffered while being hanged. This account is not well known to most Borges readers nor to typical Poe readers since Poe cut the hanging scene from the 1846 version of "Loss of Breath," which is the canonized version of the text. When Borges readers do stumble across this text, however, Poe's narrator's account of hanging feels, following the first manner Borges describes in the Kafka essay, uncannily Borgesian and recalls both Funes's memory and Borges's narrator's view of the Aleph. Proving that this connection is influence rather than coincidence, however, requires some digging, and chapter 5 provides this evidence by examining some of Borges's lesser-known critical texts—a prologue and its footnotes and an interview from the early 1980s—and by referring to the Poe books in Borges's libraries. Disinterring the buried connections between "Loss of Breath" and "Funes"/"El Aleph" reemphasizes the depth and breadth of Borges's knowledge of Poe's literary canon, and it increases the stature of Poe's early satire by revealing how it serves as a secret source for Borges's descriptions of infinity in two of his more cerebral tales.

The sixth and final chapter of *Borges's Poe*, "Supernatural Revenge," reads Borges's "El Aleph" alongside Poe's "Metzengerstein" and "The Black Cat" as fantastic revenge stories in which the supernatural happenings within each tale mask each story's revenge plot. Chapter 6 begins by theorizing the fantastic, a subject on which Borges offered several lectures, and by differentiating this literary mode from the magical real and other types of supernatural fiction. "The Black Cat," "Metzengerstein," and "El Aleph" all qualify as fantastic tales, and this chapter reveals how the supernatural events in each story—for example, the appearance of the demonic stallion in "Metzengerstein," the imprint of a gigantic cat on the only remaining wall of the narrator's fire-ravaged home in "The Black Cat," and Borges's narrator's simultaneous view of everything in the universe from every possible angle while gazing inside the minuscule Aleph in Carlos Argentino Daneri's basement—

obfuscate the driving theme behind each tale: revenge. The side-by-side reading of these three stories exposes three hidden revenge plots and demonstrates how Borges's tale flips the gratification of revenge provided by Poe on its head. In the second manner that Borges describes in the Kafka essay, the backfiring of Borges's narrator's revenge on Daneri changes how the Poe reader interprets Poe's revenge plots and leaves the reader critical of the idea that revenge can bring satisfaction.

Borges's recasting of Poe's image via his literary criticism, translations, and fiction not only alters the *modernistas*' image of Poe, but it also creates the atmosphere for the total revamping of Poe's reputation via Julio Cortázar's massive translation project in the 1950s. *Borges's Poe* scrutinizes and proves one of the primary tenets of inter-American literary studies, the idea that various literary traditions in the Americas should be read alongside one another regardless of the linguistic, political, or geographical borders that might divide them. This book also invites inter-Americanists and scholars in the New Southern Studies to return to the concept of direct (although reciprocal) influence between writers while simultaneously paying attention to the specific contexts in which one writer reinterprets another. The book also requires Borges/Poe scholars to reevaluate the relationship between the two writers as a long-running, intricate association that goes far beyond an affinity for detective fiction. Finally, *Borges's Poe* reframes the concept of literary influence as a multidimensional dialogue rather than a genetic discourse or a parricidal conflict. Poe affects one of Argentina's most essential authors, one of the Southern Hemisphere's most unique literary voices, and one of the world's most important writers of the twentieth century via direct literary influence, and Borges reshapes how a vast portion of the world understands the image and interprets the literature of one of the United States' most vital authors by renaming, translating, and rewriting Poe.