

“Hay una neurosis”: Borges, Poe, and Biography in the Notebooks, Talks, and Texts*

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Jorge Luis Borges maintained an intricate and reciprocal literary relationship with the works of Edgar Allan Poe throughout his long career. He first read Poe as a child, reread Poe throughout his life, and fondly recalled those earliest readings in his last years. He translated two of Poe’s tales; anthologized several of Poe works; wrote fiction that both openly and covertly conversed with Poe’s stories; wrote a poem titled “Edgar Allan Poe” while using “E.A.P” as a section title in another poem; dedicated a pair of articles specifically to Poe; mentioned him in over 200 articles, prologues,

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epilogues, book reviews, interviews, and published dialogues; taught about Poe's life and his writings in various classes in Argentina; and lectured on Poe to audiences throughout the southern cone and across the globe.¹ This relationship was professional and personal—Borges both applauded and critiqued Poe, and he was conversant in historical and contemporary academic debates about Poe, his image, and his influence. (For example, he cites praise for Poe from Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry, George Bernard Shaw, and others while also sharing disparaging comments on Poe from figures such as T. S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley.) He also commented, on occasion, about his personal experiences as a Poe reader, offering what might be his most poignant thoughts on Poe in a prologue to a 1985 collection of Poe stories in which he claims that Walt Whitman was by far the better poet but that “ahora Edgar Allan Poe está mucho más cerca de mí” (“Prólogo” 12).²

Several scholars have examined the Borges-Poe relationship, publishing a number of articles and a pair of monographs—John T. Irwin's *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* and my own *Borges's Poe: The Influence and Reinvention of Edgar Allan Poe in Spanish America*.³ Up to this point, most of this scholarship focuses squarely on Poe's and Borges's published works rather than on any of their manuscripts, and for good reasons; Borges, to the best of our knowledge, never had access to any of Poe's manuscripts, and many of Borges's manuscripts, at least those that have much to do with Poe, were not (or, at least, had not been) readily available for consultation. In *Borges's Poe*, I analyzed a few of Borges's notes on Poe found in the margins of his books held by the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges and by the Centro de Estudios

1 For an extensive, although not yet comprehensive, list of Borges's written and spoken interactions with Poe's literary corpus, see my three annotated bibliographies in the journal *Poe Studies: History, Theory, Interpretation*.

2 Borges finishes this statement, and the prologue, with the following: “Hace casi setenta años, sentado en el último peldaño de una escalera que ya no existe, leí ‘The Pit and the Pendulum’; he olvidado cuántas veces lo he releído o me lo he hecho leer; sé que no he llegado a la última y que regresaré a la cárcel cuadrangular que se estrecha y al abismo del fondo” (“Prólogo” 12-13).

3 For a sampling of this scholarship, see Maurice J. Bennett's “The Detective Fiction of Poe and Borges” and Graciela E. Tissera's “Jorge Luis Borges.”

y Documentación Jorge Luis Borges at the Biblioteca Nacional Argentina, and I made a small number of connections between Poe and some of Borges's notes and manuscripts held in the stunning Jorge Luis Borges Collection in the Albert and Sherry Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia and in the smaller but extremely valuable Jorge Luis Borges Collection at the Harry Ramson Center at the University of Texas at Austin. I also catalogued Borges's available marginal notes on Poe in one of the annotated bibliographies that I published in *Poe Studies*. In the book, I felt that the occasional link between my analysis of Borges's and Poe's published works and Borges's *avant-textes* added both nuance and power to my argument, and I was confident that the cataloguing of Borges's marginal notes on Poe in the annotated bibliography could open up new lines of research between the two writers for future scholars to explore. In both cases, however, the big manuscripts were missing. None of the collections to which I had access at the time held any of Borges's manuscripts, lengthy notes, or other *avant-textes* that were devoted specifically to Poe.

That all changed in late 2018 and early 2019 with Michigan State University's acquisition of a major collection of Borges manuscripts, letters, and other material from Joanne Yates.⁴ Among its many gems, the Donald Yates Collection on Jorge Luis Borges contains over 20 Borges manuscript sets, mostly notebooks.⁵ The notebooks include everything from drafts of stories and poems to extensive notes for classes that Borges taught on various literary subjects. For me, these *avant-textes* are also a treasure trove of Poe material. Four notebooks in particular—all Avon brand, two with red covers and two with grey—contain extensive notes on Poe, detective fiction, or both. This sudden and fortunate increase in the availability of Borges manuscript material on Poe coincides nicely with the emphasis that several Borges scholars, including Daniel Balderston, María Celeste

4 Joanne Yates is the widow of the late Donald A. Yates who taught in the Spanish Department at Michigan State University for more than a quarter of a century. Yates was a Latin Americanist who specialized in detective fiction. He was a Borges scholar and one of Borges's first English-language translators. Throughout the 1970s, he organized Borges's stays at Michigan State and facilitated several of Borges's lengthier trips throughout the United States.

5 This collection is part of the Stephen O. Murray and Keelung Hong Special Collections Library at Michigan State University.

Martín, Nora Benedict, Laura Rosato, and Germán Álvarez, have given to Borges's *avant-textes* in general over the past decade.

Borges's Poe notes, in true Borges fashion, reveal numerous paths for future studies on Borges and Poe, including a reexamination of Borges's harsh judgments of Poe's poetry; a more in-depth analysis of Borges's thoughts on twentieth-century detective fiction and Poe's connections to it; a nuanced return to Borges's relationship with his most-cited Poe text, "The Philosophy of Composition"; or the focus of this article—a genetic critique of Borges's interactions with Poe biographies and an analysis of how what Borges read about Poe's life affected his approach to the former author, both in his writing and in his public talks. What I offer here is not a critical-genetic edition of any given Borges text on Poe—say, his 1949 article in *La Nación* titled "Edgar Allan Poe"—but, instead, an analysis of how these *avant-textes* can both alter and enrich our understanding of Borges's thoughts on Poe by revealing to us more clearly Borges's interlocutors on Poe's biography. We cannot, although Poe somewhat infamously tried to suggest otherwise in "The Philosophy of Composition," get into an author's head, but Borges's notes on Poe allow us to trace some of the movements of his thought process as he prepared both published works and public lectures on Poe.

POE BIOGRAPHIES AND POE'S BIOGRAPHY IN BORGES'S PUBLISHED WORKS

Borges often mentioned Poe's life, but his published works (the solo-authored articles, prologues, epilogues, and lectures as well as the collaborative dialogues and interviews) reveal precious little about which Poe biographies Borges was reading to learn these details. In his many solo-authored works that mention Poe, Borges only discusses (and very briefly) Poe biographies three times. He offers a fairly cold review of Edward Shanks's 1937 biography *Edgar Allan Poe* in *El Hogar* in 1937; in a 1941 review of Shank's biography of Rudyard Kipling in *Sur*, he is even more cutting, claiming, in parenthesis, that Shanks is an "(autor de muy olvidables poemas y de un mediocre estudio de Poe)" ("Edward Shanks" 244). Finally, in a 1943 article for *La Nación* about William Beckford's *Vathek*, Borges explains his exasperation with a biography on Beckford that fails to mention that novel by giving other examples of what he finds

to be ridiculous biographies. One of his examples critiques an unnamed life of Poe: “Setecientas páginas en octavo comprende cierta vida de Poe; el autor, fascinado por los cambios de domicilio, apenas logra rescatar un paréntesis para el ‘Maelström’ y para la cosmogonía de *Eureka*” (“Sobre el ‘Vathek’” 130).

Moving from the solo-authored works to the collaborative ones offers little more on Poe biographies, just one conversation with Osvaldo Ferrari and a brief headnote from Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares in one of their anthologies. In the conversation with Ferrari, Borges includes a specific Poe biography in a biting critique of contemporary literary studies. I will quote Borges at length here because his words reveal the likely author of the unnamed Poe biography mentioned above and for other reasons that will become clear later in the article. He tells Ferrari:

quizá una de las ventajas para estudiar, por ejemplo, los orígenes de la literatura, es que se han perdido todos esos chismes: los nombres de los autores, las fechas; algo tan importante para los críticos actuales como los cambios de domicilio... yo he leído un libro sobre Poe, de Harvey [sic] Allen, creo, que casi no era otra cosa que los cambios de domicilio de Poe. Casi no había otra cosa, y, sin embargo, lo menos importante son los cambios de domicilio: todo el mundo cambia de domicilio; pero lo importante es lo que un escritor ha soñado, y el libro que nos ha dejado. Todo eso se sustituye por cambios de domicilio, o –en el caso de los psicoanalistas– se sustituye por chismes, indiscreciones sobre la vida sexual... además, se entiende que todo escritor debe odiar a su padre y querer a su madre, u odiar a su madre y querer a su padre. Todo eso está reemplazando a la literatura, al goce estético, que es casi desconocido ahora. (“Las letras” 188)

In the brief authorial headnote (under 100 words) that Borges and Bioy Casares added to accompany the translation of Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” in the third edition of *Los mejores cuentos policiales*, we see two titles following the word “Bibliografía”—Allen’s *Israfel* and Joseph Wood Krutch’s *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study in Genius*.

Concerning Poe biographies, then, over 200 Borges texts leave us only with the facts that Borges had read Shanks’s *Edgar Allan Poe* and Hervey Allen’s *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe*, that he did not like either book, and that the latter title—which does have over 700 pages and often mentions Poe’s changes of residence—served as both a named (in 1985) and an unnamed (in 1943) example of the type of biography that Borges

scorned because it does not focus enough on the author's literary works. We also see Krutch's Poe biography as a possible source for Borges's and/or Bioy Casares's knowledge about Poe. Finally, we can surmise from the end of the quotation in the dialogue with Ferrari (at least, before reading Krutch) that Borges would not be a fan of, say, Marie Bonaparte's *The Life & Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*, had he read it, or of other psychoanalytic approaches to Poe's life.

Knowing which Poe biographies Borges was reading, and better yet, which passages were standing out to him, is important because in almost every lengthy piece in which Borges writes or speaks about Poe (and in many of the shorter ones as well) he frames his interpretation of Poe's literature on a very specific version of Poe's life—a pathetic, downtrodden portrait of an artist suffering from a mental disorder. The only visible exceptions are his 1935 article “La génesis de ‘El cuervo de Poe’” in *La Prensa* in which he offers a detailed analysis of “The Philosophy of Composition” and completely avoids discussing Poe's biography and a 1984 dialogue with Roberto Alifano about Poe and Chesterton in which Borges manages to converse about Poe's detective fiction for several paragraphs without tainting the conversation by mentioning Poe's mental health.

“Neurosis” functions as a key word in Borges's published descriptions of Poe's biography. Borges begins his “Edgar Allan Poe” for *La Nación* with the following opener: “Detrás de Poe (como detrás de Swift, de Carlyle, de Almafuerite) hay una neurosis” (1). Partway through his lengthy 1978 lecture “El cuento policial,” he claims that Poe “[m]urió a los cuarenta años, estaba entregado al alcohol, entregado a la melancolía y a la neurosis” (232). In his 1985 prologue for *E. A. Poe: La carta robada*—the eighteenth title in the *La Biblioteca de Babel* series—Borges returns to Poe's “neurosis” (11). In a dialogue with Ferrari about Poe that was published the year after Borges's death, Borges avoids “neurosis” but claims, following Ferrari's lead, that “en el caso de Poe, vemos esa imagen; es decir, tenemos una visión bastante concreta de un hombre de genio, de un hombre muy desdichado” (189). Finally, in the prologue to his posthumously published anthology *Edgar Allan Poe: Cuentos*, Borges avers that Poe was “[d]e índole agresiva y neurótica” (9). Borges's recurrent argument that Poe was neurotic is not his most-repeated claim about Poe—he makes assertions about Poe as the inventor of detective fiction, examines “The Philosophy

of Composition”, and names contemporary literature’s debt to Poe even more often—but it is certainly his most-repeated claim about Poe’s life. And, as we will see, it becomes a catalyst for his most powerful and most repeated argument about Poe—that his reputation rests on his fiction, not his poetry. It also informs Borges’s understating of Poe’s invention of detective fiction, the Poe genre with which Borges most directly engages—as an author of fiction, a literary critic, a translator, and an anthologizer—throughout his career. At the same time, Borges’s persistent musings on Poe’s alleged neurosis leaves Borges open to some of the very critiques he offers about psychoanalytic biographies.

POE BIOGRAPHIES AND POE’S BIOGRAPHY IN BORGES’S *AVANT-TEXTES*

Borges’s personal libraries can verify some of the titles on Poe biography that Borges was reading, but unfortunately, most of these books are quite sparse on actual notes. Among the books related to Poe that are held by the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges in Buenos Aires, two titles are relevant to this discussion of Poe biography—an Ingram edition of Poe’s works and Krutch’s biography. Borges’s copy of volume 1 of John Henry Ingram’s edition of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* begins with Ingram’s biography/memoir of Poe. Borges left six notes and his signature on the last page of this book, but each of the notes refers back to specific Poe stories rather than to the biographical material. Borges’s copy of Krutch’s *Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of Genius* contains no notes from Borges. The Centro de Estudios y Documentación Jorge Luis Borges at the Biblioteca Nacional Argentina also holds Poe-related material, and two of the titles contain substantial Poe biography. The first is a copy of *The Centenary Poe: Tales, Poems, Criticism, Marginalia and Eureka by Edgar Allan Poe* which contains a highly biographical 32-page introduction by the book’s editor, Montagu Slater. Borges left three notes on the last page of this text, but none of them refer to the introduction. Borges’s copy of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* includes a 15-page headnote by Killis Campbell—an anthologizer and editor of Poe’s poetry. Borges’s only notes relating to the Poe material in this anthology are both in response to Campbell’s headnote, and one of them is specific to Poe’s biography. This note, in Leonor Acevedo de Borges’s handwriting, appears on the book’s last page and quotes Campbell’s opener “II-55—The sadest [sic] and the strangest” (Rosato and Álvarez

81). Campbell's quote finishes with "figure in American literary history is that of Edgar Allan Poe"—demonstrating a clear influence on Borges's continual descriptions in print of Poe as a pathetic figure. Rosato and Álvarez have also had access to Borges's copy of Shanks's *Edgar Allan Poe*, but like Borges's copy of Krutch's biography, the Shanks book has no notes from Borges.⁶

In contrast to the meager notes in Borges's personal Poe books that are currently accessible in Borges's physical libraries, some of his unpublished notebooks provide abundant notes about Poe biographies. Of the multiple manuscript sets and notebooks in the Donald Yates Collection on Jorge Luis Borges at Michigan State, four notebooks contain significant notes on Poe.⁷ They are: a red Avon notebook (MSS 678-21) with Borges's notes on 10 pages that Yates dates as being from 1942; a grey Avon notebook (MSS 678-04) that is clearly marked on the front cover in Borges's hand with "Adrogué, 1949" and that contains extensive notes (35 pages with script) on Poe, Emerson, Melville, Whitman, and Thoreau and, strangely, an insert of five pages on the philosopher David Hume;⁸ another red Avon notebook (MSS 678-03)—the largest Borges notebook in this collection and probably the largest in the world—with script from Borges on 76 pages and dated by Yates as being from 1950; and another grey Avon notebook (MSS 678-09) with Borges's notes—some in Spanish and many in English—on 25 pages that Yates claims are from 1953. The 1942 red Avon does not have a section dedicated to Poe, but it briefly treats him in the notes on *Almafuerte* and in the section on detective fiction. The 1949 grey Avon includes an eleven-page section of notes on Poe (eight rectos, three versos), a brief appearance of Poe in the section on Emerson, and the notebook's final verso which contains reactions to Poe from Shaw, Baudelaire, and Borges. The 1950 red Avon includes a four-page section on detective fiction (three rectos, one verso) that focuses primarily on Poe

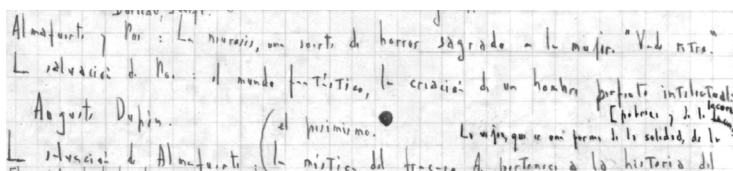
6 This book is held in the Colección Patricio Gannon at the Biblioteca de la Academia Argentina de Letras "Jorge Luis Borges," and its bibliographical information will be included in Rosato and Álvarez's future second volume of *Borges, libros y lecturas* (Álvarez).

7 One of Borges's Mérito notebooks (filed as MSS 383) that arrived at Michigan State before the larger acquisition in 2018 also contains three brief notes on Poe that appear in Borges's notes on other writers and topics.

8 The Hume pages have noticeably been torn out of another notebook and inserted here.

and a three-page section on Arthur Conan Doyle that mentions Poe twice and cites him once. Finally, the 1953 grey Avon holds a two-page section on Poe, a three-page section on realistic vs. fantastic fiction that includes a discussion of “The Philosophy of Composition,” and a two-page section on detective fiction that briefly mentions Poe.⁹ In what follows, I concentrate primarily on the two earlier notebooks because of their focus on Poe’s biography more than his works.

The brief piece on Almafuerite (the pseudonym for Pedro Bonifacio Palacios) in the first red Avon notebook (MSS 678-21) makes a strong statement about Poe’s biography by claiming that both Almafuerite and Poe suffer from a specific neurosis—the fear of women. (See Image 1.)



Borges claims that Almafuerite’s “salvación” from this fear is “la mística del fracaso” or “el pesimismo,” and he includes a • that takes the reader to the top of the page where he has listed several pessimistic quotes from Almafuerite. The description of this supposed neurosis that Borges provides—“una suerte de horror sagrado a la mujer. ‘Vade retro’”—might suggest to us that Poe sought for his “salvación” through his textual shunning of women in all of his works that include the illness and death of a beautiful woman. A story like “Berenice,” for example, clearly shows what we could call “horror sagrado” toward its eponymous character, and both that tale and “The Fall of the House of Usher” depict male characters whose violent rejections of women almost scream “get back” or *vade retro satana*. Borges does not take this path in suggesting what rescues Poe from this supposed fear. Instead, he states that “el mundo fantástico, la creación de un hombre perfecto intelectual: Auguste Dupin” save Poe from his neurosis. For Almafuerite’s salvation, Borges uses an open parenthesis, lists one option on top of the other, and ends each option with a period, suggesting that

⁹ This notebook also contains two other 2-page sections on detective fiction that do not mention Poe.

he is still deciding between “el pesimismo” and “la mística del fracaso.”¹⁰ For Poe’s salvation, however, Borges lists two ideas in succession—separating “el mundo fantástico” and the literary creation of Dupin with a comma rather than a period—and he does not use a bracket nor a parenthesis to indicate that he is still choosing between the two. However, the question remains as to whether Borges names two distinct literary genres here or simply uses different terms to describe the same thing. In other words, is Poe saved from a fear of women by his fantastic fiction and by his detective fiction, or does “la creación de un hombre perfecto intelectual: August Dupin” that comes after the comma simply provide a specific example of Poe’s “mundo fantástico”? Borges’s published works support both options. At various places in his written corpus, Borges juxtaposes the fantastic and detective fiction—especially when contrasting the works of Poe and Chesterton.¹¹ But, at other times, Borges openly states “que el género policial es un género fantástico” (Borges and Alifano, “La literatura policial” 13).¹² Whether detective fiction is separate from or a variation on the fantastic in Borges’s mind, he sees the ideas of order and intellect—as created in Poe’s original rational detective—as what saves Poe.

This particular notebook carries no date nor signature, but Yates’s accompanying note dates the notebook as “1942” by arguing that the notes on *Almafuerte* are “for 1942 *Nación* piece.” Borges’s 1942 “Teoría de *Almafuerte*” does repeat the idea that *Almafuerte* embraced pessimism, failure, and frustration, and it includes five of the many quotes that Borges lists in these notes to prove that point. However, the published piece is missing the notebook’s two most powerful statements on *Almafuerte*: “Cualquier hombre de letras podría corregir cualquier página de *Almafuerte*, pero solo él pudo haberla escrito” and “Si excluimos a *Almafuerte*, tendríamos asimismo que excluir a Homero, a Milton, a Hugo, a Quevedo y a buen parte de Dante y de Shakespeare.” If these are the notes for the 1942 article, it seems odd that Borges—who enjoyed making the

10 See Balderston’s *How Borges Wrote* for an explanation of the different ways in which Borges used brackets, parentheses, and other methods to provide textual alternatives within his different types of manuscripts (14-18).

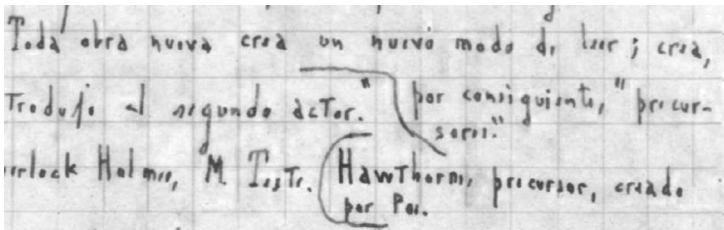
11 See, for example, “Modos de G. K. Chesterton” and “Nota sobre Chesterton.”

12 See Borges and Bioy Casares’s 1981 prologue to *Los mejores cuentos policiales* for more language that compares rather than contrasts detective fiction and the fantastic.

backhanded type of compliment we see in the first statement and who often made similar lists of the inclusion/exclusion of his preferred authors among the canonized writers of world literature—would write these two declarations out of the article (and out of his revision of that article as a prologue for *Prosa y poesía de Almafuerde* twenty years later).

Some important clues to this mystery reside in the particular scripts of the passages I have analyzed thus far and those visible in other notes in this notebook. The ideas on Almafuerde, Poe, and neurosis appear on the front of a page about halfway through the notebook in a Borges script that Balderston calls “a larger handwriting” (*How Borges* 12) in somewhat faded black ink.¹³ The two statements about Almafuerde’s uniqueness, however, appear on the verso of that same sheet, as the opening and closing statements of a sixteen-line paragraph that looks more like a stanza of poetry than like academic notes.¹⁴ Most of the paragraph’s lines only reach the halfway point on the width of the page. The paragraph is in a smaller Borges script, what Balderston calls “Borges’s usual handwriting from 1923 to 1955” (10), and in a darker black ink. All of this suggests that Borges inserted this paragraph of praise for Almafuerde into the manuscript at a later date.

The next section in this notebook—a full recto about detective fiction with one sentence on the verso—contains notes in Borges’s typical handwriting but written in the same faded ink that Borges used for the two rectos (but not the verso) on Almafuerde. This section contains a small and fascinating detail that corroborates Yates’s 1942 date of the notebook. (See image 2.)



13 Balderston notes that Borges often used this larger version of his handwriting in “fair copies”—some meant as gifts—and “second drafts” (12). This case appears to be an exception, a usage of that larger script in a fairly rough set of notes.

14 These sixteen lines, sadly, do not form a quatern. They do, however, discuss poetry—the lyric and the epic poem—while calling Almafuerde’s poetry “retórica.”

Borges opens this section by describing the difficulty we have when trying to imagine the origins of a literary genre. He then states: “Toda obra nueva crea un nuevo modo de leer; crea, por consiguiente, ‘precursores.’ Hawthorne, precursor, creado por Poe.” Apart from the intriguing (and early) hints at the theory of influence that Borges later develops in “Kafka y sus precursores,” this note makes a veiled acknowledgement to Poe serving as a precursor for Hawthorne’s “detective” fiction, which is exactly what happens when Borges and Bioy Casares include a translation of Hawthorne’s not-very-detective-like “Mr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe” as the lead story (right before Poe’s “The Purloined Letter”) in their 1943 anthology *Los mejores cuentos policiales*.¹⁵ The concept of reciprocal influence that Borges puts forth in his famous essay “Kafka y sus precursores” in 1951 has its own precursor—Borges’s 1949 class on Hawthorne at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores,¹⁶ which he published in 1952 as “Nathaniel Hawthorne” in *Otras inquisiciones*. That precursor appears to have its own precursor in the rationale behind the inclusion of “Higginbotham” in *Los mejores cuentos policiales* that Borges first states in these notes. The avant-texte both reveals a logic to Hawthorne’s place in *Los mejores cuentos policiales* that can only be guessed at by reading the published anthology of detective stories and suggests an even earlier genesis of Borges’s theory of influence than scholars (myself included) have been able to nail down previously.

The 1943 release of *Los mejores cuentos policiales* indicates that Yates’s 1942 date for this notebook is probably close, at least for the initial entries, but the sixteen lines of praise for Almafuerte on the verso between the two rectos about the poet still seem out of place—or better stated, out of time. Returning to the original passage in these notes about Poe’s and Almafuerte’s neurosis reveals an insertion in Borges’s small script and in a darker ink that says “La mujer, que es una forma de la soledad, la pobreza

15 For more on Hawthorne’s tale as proto-detective fiction and this play on the idea of literary precursors between Borges, Hawthorne, and Poe, see my “Playing the Detective with ‘Mr. Higginbotham’s Catastrophe’ and ‘La muerte repetida.’”

16 For more on Borges’s class on Hawthorne, see Mariela Blanco and her team’s website on Borges’s 1949-1955 classes and conferences: <http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/3>. For more on how Borges’s manuscripts reveal the development of his ideas on Kafka and literary influence, see Balderston’s “The Warring Brothers: Borges Reads Kafka and Flaubert” and pages 27-36 in *How Borges Wrote*.

y de la locura locura.”¹⁷ This insertion clearly matches the writing of the 16 lines of praise for Almafuerte on the verso and appears to be an addition to the original notes rather than as an option from the initial writing session. The insertion could merely suggest a different session on a different day, but when this notebook is read side-by-side with the grey Avon notebook from 1949 (and when considering what Borges was doing with Poe in 1949), the insertions appear to be from that year instead. And, Borges’s 1949 notes on Poe also illuminate the 1942 notes by revealing which biographer Borges was channeling when describing Poe as neurotic and when naming his neurosis as the fear of women—Krutch.¹⁸

1949 was a commemorative year for Poe readers throughout the world as they marked the centennial of Poe’s death. Borges was involved in this commemoration in both his teaching and his writing: he taught a class on Poe in March as part of his 10-lecture course of study “Clásicos de las letras norteamericanas” offered at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores;¹⁹ he gave a lecture in October on detective fiction at the Instituto de Filosofía in San Miguel de Tucumán;²⁰ he gave another lecture on detective fiction in Bahía Blanca at the Universidad Nacional del Sur in November;²¹ and he published one of his two solo-authored articles dedicated particularly to

17 Balderston calls this “smaller version” of Borges’s typical handwriting “interlinear insertions” (*How Borges* 10). In many manuscripts, these insertions are in the same ink, while in others (like these notes on Almafuerte), a distinct ink suggests that Borges made the insertions at a later date.

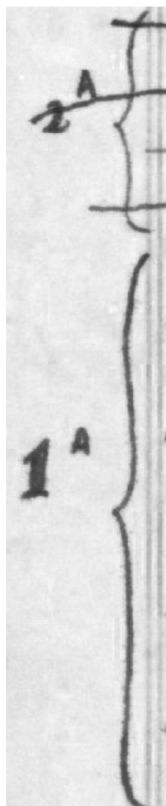
18 Finally, a different path might suggest that this notebook is simply from 1949. Blanco’s website shows that Borges spoke at the Universidad Nacional del Sur in Bahía Blanca on Almafuerte on November 4, 1949 and on detective fiction on the November 5 (<http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/31>). Earlier that year, Borges gave a lecture on Plotinus at the Colegio Libre de Estudios Superiores on June 17 (<http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/120>). Pages on Plotinus (two), Almafuerte (three), and detective fiction (two) make up seven of the 10 pages that contain Borges’s script in this notebook; one of the other three pages—beginning *in medias res* (numbered as page “2” and halfway through a sentence)—has notes on *Macbeth* as a fantastic text, and Borges gave at least six talks on the fantastic in 1949, the first on June 18 (<http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/conferencias-por-tema/389>). Whether Borges wrote this notebook in 1949 or started writing in it 1942 and then added to it in 1949, one thing seems clear: several of Borges’s 1949 talks revolve around subjects that he explores in this particular Avon.

19 <http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/105>.

20 <http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/29>.

21 <http://centroborges.bn.gov.ar/node/30>.

Poe—"Edgar Allan Poe"—in *La Nación*.²² While the course in March and the talk in November might not have been strictly commemorative, the October talk and the article in *La Nación* clearly were. The latter was marked "septiembre de 1949" by Borges and published on October 2—just five days before the centennial—while Borges delivered the Tucumán lecture a week later, on October 9. A local newspaper's report of that talk makes the commemoration clear, quoting Borges: "Este año [. . .] se cumplió el Centenario de la muerte de Poe" ("La literatura").



The grey Avon notebook from 1949 (MSS 678-04) probably served as Borges's lecture notes, or at least as preparation notes, for five of the ten classes that Borges taught that year for the aforementioned "Clásicos de las letras norteamericanas" course—Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman. The Poe notes in this notebook also say things that Borges repeats in his October article in *La Nación* and in his later talks that year. These Poe notes are far more chaotic than the notes on the other four authors in this notebook. In page numbering and in theme, they seem to form two separate Poe segments—the first (with notes on five rectos and three versos) dealing primarily with Poe's biography, and the second focusing more on his works (over three rectos). The page numbers are a jumbled mess as the first segment begins with no page number, jumps to 3, then 4, then back to 2, then 2A.²³ The second segment follows a clearer order of pages numbered 1, 2, and 3 in that order, although the numerals 1 and 2 are written in the script, size, and style of the section numbers I discuss below. What clearly divides the two segments is Borges's use of section numbers—larger numerals in a completely different and somewhat affected script in the left margins (and sometimes with curly brackets)—in the first five rectos. (See image 3.) The

22 Poe died mysteriously on October 7, 1849. Borges dates this article "septiembre de 1949" (1) and *La Nación* printed it on October 2, 1949.

23 The three versos with writing in this segment all contain marked notes (with #s, •s, or other symbols) that connect directly to the same symbols Borges leaves on the rectos.

section numbers are also out of order—1, 2^A, 1^A, 3, 4, 5, 2, 2^A—and they show Borges wrestling with the difficulties of constructing Poe’s biography for his intended audience. He wavers between taking a chronological approach, almost like bullet points, that lists various happenings in Poe’s life (sections 2 and 2^A) and both summarizing and passing judgment on various biographies of Poe and their interpretations of his life (sections 1, 2^A, 1^A, and 3) before suggesting that Poe’s prose is better than his poetry (section 4) and briefly examining Poe’s tales of ratiocination (section 5). This segment of five rectos and three versos is, in the end, a Poe biography, and the bouncing between the numbered sections (and the occasional elision of a section like 2^A only to repeat the crossed-out information in another section) show Borges working through different ways of telling Poe’s biography and distinct interpretations of Poe’s life made by others.

Section 1 opens with a veiled reference that captures Borges’s overall feelings about Poe. Borges states, simply, that Poe is “Uno de los hombres más geniales y más desdichados que registra la historia.” This is a translated and boiled down version of the opening paragraph of Killis Campbell’s biographical headnote on Poe in *The Cambridge History of American Literature* that begins with the sentence “The saddest and strangest figure in American literary history is that of Edgar Allan Poe” (55)—one of the quotations Borges noted in his copy of the book—and ends with “there are few today who will not readily concede to him a place among the foremost writers of America [...] there are not wanting those who account him one of the two or three writers of indisputable genius that America has pronounced” (55). Borges continues this section by noting the abundance of Poe biographies—citing John Ingram’s telling of Poe’s life as “la más famosa” example of Poe biographies “de carácter apologética,” and calling Allen’s *Israfel* “La más copiosa” of a later type of biography that attempts to “verificar [...] rectificar [...] y negar [...] los hechos historiados por Ingram.” As he does later in print, he then critiques Allen’s 700 pages and his emphasis on Poe’s changes of address. This section is also enveloped in the upper and left margins by a note marked with a • that tells us that Ingram’s purpose is to “refutar los ataques del Reverendo Rufus Griswold.”²⁴

24 This note, along with the insertion of a quote from Andrew Lang about the myriad of legends surrounding Poe (found in Lang’s *History of English Literature*, 579), are in a darker ink but the same script as the majority of this page.

From Griswold, Ingram, and Allen the notes move to the brief section 2^A, which mentions both Allen and Krutch but is crossed out, and then continue to 1^A—a section that begins by saying that the types of biography that hunt down the historical minutiae have disproved several of the myths created in the romantic and apologetic biographies of Poe. Borges then notes the existence of a certain type of British Poe biography that is recognizable for its “tono protector y por su parsimonia, o penuria en el elogio.” This is another veiled reference, this time to Shanks’s Poe biography which Borges, in his published review, reads as “una apología de Poe” that needs to “implorar disculpas” (“Edgar Allan Poe, de Edward Shanks” 332).²⁵ He then mentions how French biographers of Poe, starting with Baudelaire, often pit Poe against the United States, and he juxtaposes that assertion with Shaw’s claim that “todo hombre de genio es finalmente derrotado por su país.”

Section 3 begins with this line: “Tales son, en resumen, los hechos de la vida de Poe”—a clear demonstration that this section logically follows sections 2 and 2^A (at the end of the segment) because they list many of those facts—and then jumps headlong into Krutch’s biography of Poe. Sections 4 and 5 move away from the biography toward Poe’s works, but then sections 2 and 2^A bring us right back to biography by listing over fifteen “hechos” (some brief, some lengthy) before claiming “Aquí podemos abandonar el rigor cronológico” and then offering another dozen or so.

What becomes clear in all of this juggling is the centrality (both structural and thematic) of Joseph Wood Krutch’s reading of Poe’s life in how Borges thinks about Poe in this avant-texte, in how he described Poe in the 1942 notebook, and in how he later portrays Poe in his published works and in his classes and lectures. If we reorganize the numbered sections of this segment of Poe notes in their numerical order—1, 1A, 2, 2A, 3, 4, 5—and delete the crossed-out version of 2^A, we see Krutch in the structural center; his thoughts pepper the lists Borges offers in sections 2 and 2A,²⁶ and

25 Borges suggests that an English literary critic “no puede hacer la apología de un mero *yankee* sin implorar disculpas” (332).

26 These “hechos” are primarily uncited references to Allen and Krutch. A few of the ideas from Krutch include: Poe comparing Thomas Dunn English to a baboon (page 129 in Krutch); the description of Virginia as “un ángel tísico” (page 55 in Krutch, “that

Borges forms the entire section 3 around his claims. More significantly, Borges gives weight to Krutch's driving thesis by claiming that it serves, above and beyond the ideas shared by the other biographers that Borges has mentioned, as the best way to understand Poe, his life, and his works. After the transition sentence cited above, section 3 states:

Más importante que los hechos individuales, más importante que las oscuras acusaciones del Reverendo Rufus, que las leyendas paliatorias de Ingram y que las topografías y cronologías de Hervey Allen, es el concepto de una teoría de Poe, de una ley general q. explique las singularidades de su destino y de su obra. Es lo ~~hecho~~ [replaced with "intentado" in the left margin] por Joseph Wood Krutch, en la obra *E.A.P.*, publicada en 1926.²⁷

With this statement Borges quickly dispatches the other Poe biographers he has previously mentioned and hones in on Krutch's work as containing the key to understanding everything Poe.

This key, or "law" or "theory" in Borges's words, to understanding Poe is neurosis. Borges's next sentence reflects back to the 1942 Avon notebook's piece on Almafuerte and rebounds out to most of Borges's significant publications or talks on Poe, only here Borges openly names the source while in the 1942 Avon and in all of the publications he does not: "Wood Krutch razona que E.A.P. adolecía de una neurosis que lo hacía concebir como un horror, y como una imposibilidad, y quizá como un crimen, la intimidad con una mujer." Borges then goes on to argue that all "anomalías" of Poe's life—including his marriage to his much younger cousin, Virginia—and of his works—"la tristeza, la angustia, la castidad, la convicción de la culpa, el terror; la circunstancia, registrada por algún crítico, de que las mujeres creadas por su imaginación 'son o estatuas o

consumptive angel"); the discussion of Virginia's lack of mental and physical development (pages 55-56 in Krutch); the description of Virginia on her deathbed, "Su pobre muerte, abrigada por un sobretodo de Poe y por un gato negro" (page 169 in Krutch, "wrapped in her husband's greatcoat, with a large tortoise-shell cat on her bosom"); among others.

27 The earlier crossed out section, 2^A, skips Griswold but takes the same tack with Ingram and Allen before arguing for the importance of Krutch's approach to Poe as "un estudio de su neurosis." Between 2^A and section 3, the tone and angle do not change. Borges's decision to elide 2^A appears to be an organizational one as he creates a new section 2 and section 2^A that list facts before offering section 3's focus on Krutch and the idea of Poe's neurosis.

ángeles” —now make sense if the reader realizes that Poe’s literature is his intellectual attempt or “subterfugio espléndido” to turn away from his neurosis.²⁸

Finally, Borges quotes Krutch, in translation, and claims that Poe “inventó el género policial para no enloquecerse.”²⁹ This idea, like the previous claims about Poe’s neurosis, hearkens back to the brief notes on Poe in the *Almafuerte* section of the 1942 Avon notebook. Here, Borges names and quotes Krutch, acknowledging the source of the idea that Poe created detective fiction to save his own sanity. In the previous notebook, Krutch remains invisible while Borges puts forward, as his own argument, that the invention of C. Auguste Dupin was Poe’s “salvación” from “La neurosis, una suerte de horror sagrado a la mujer [...] La mujer que es una forma de la soledad, de la pobreza y de la locura locura.” Krutch, it seems clear, is the uncited source for this conceptual nugget from the earlier *avant-texte*, and his influence only grows in the 1949 Avon notebook.

Borges’s replacement of the term “hecho” with the word “intentado” when describing Krutch’s theory on Poe might appear to hedge his bets about Krutch’s thesis, as might his admission on the same page of the 1949 Avon notebook that “Un diagnóstico emitido a los setenta años de haber muerto el paciente no puede ser indiscutible.” The rest of the page (which is also the rest of section 3), however, makes a hard sell for Krutch’s argument. Borges calls Krutch’s diagnosis of Poe “infinitamente probable”; he notes that Ludwig Lewisohn agrees with Krutch in *The Spirit of American Literature*;³⁰ he links Poe’s own famous claim from the preface of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*—“that terror is not of Ger-

28 The unnamed critic who calls Poe’s female characters “statues or angels” is Lambert A. Wilmer in his 1859 *Our Press Gang*. If Borges did not have access to Wilmer’s book, he could have seen this quotation from Wilmer cited in the fifth chapter of volume 1—the biography—of James A. Harrison’s Poe edition. <https://www.eapoe.org/works/harrison/jaho1b05.htm#tnc09601>

29 Krutch ends the fifth chapter of his Poe biography with the following sentence: “Poe invented the detective story in order that he might not go mad” (118).

30 This reference contains a mistake in the title. Ludwig Lewisohn wrote *The Story of American Literature*, not *The Spirit of American Literature*. Lewisohn refers to Krutch’s Poe biography, calling it “brilliant and definitive” while suggesting that Krutch “shows an insufficient sympathy for the blind and bitter suffering that must have afflicted the poet” (158). Borges owned Lewisohn’s book, and his copy (with annotations) is held at the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges. *The Spirit of American Literature* is by

many, but of the soul” (473)—to Krutch’s argument; he claims “que no habría mejor ejemplo que Poe” to demonstrate what Shakespeare called “los dulce empleos de la adversidad”;³¹ and he connects the second-to-last line of his own future poem—“El poeta declara su nombradía”—to Poe: “mis instrumentos de trabajo son la humillación y la angustia.” In short order, then, Borges refers to Poe’s own words, to a literary critic that Borges trusts, to the king of the English-language literary canon, and to his own future publication to argue for Krutch’s specific pathologizing of Poe as deathly afraid of women. If that were not enough, an excised sentence directly after the reference to Lewisohn states: “Lo confirman todos los hechos; no hay uno que lo excluya.” In short, this avant-texte defends, relies on, and perpetuates Krutch’s diagnosis of Poe, and this neurotic Poe then populates so many of the texts and talks that Borges publishes and delivers on Poe afterwards.

TEXTS + AVANT-TEXTES = A MORE COMPLETE DIAGNOSIS

Most schools of literary criticism favor, or even fetishize, an author’s published texts over drafts, notes, or marginalia. The French tradition of genetic criticism, however, finds complexity, play, and movement in a writer’s *avant-textes*, which allows the critic to reveal how an author’s texts and *avant-textes* inform, reflect, alter, and illuminate one another. This approach seems particularly well-suited for studying the works of Borges who, in 1921, claimed that “[l]o marginal es lo más bello” (“Crítica” 101), and who, eleven years later, argued that “[p]resuponer que toda recombinación de elementos es obligatoriamente inferior a su original, es presuponer que el borrador 9 es obligatoriamente inferior al borrador H—ya que no puede haber sino borradores. El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio” (“Las versiones” 239, emphasis in original).

In the particular case that I have explored in this article—Borges’s reading and usage of Poe biographies in notebooks, a few talks, and several published texts—the *avant-textes* emphasize how Borges’s understanding

John Macy. It does have a chapter on Poe, but it does not refer to Krutch’s biography (as it was published thirteen years before Krutch’s book).

31 In *As You Like It*, Duke Senior proclaims “sweet are the uses of adversity” (2.1.12).

of (and, indeed, his advocacy for) Poe rely on a problematic interpretation of Poe's life. In Borges's published works on Poe, a reader can find a clear pattern of alleged neurosis, but without the notebooks, it is impossible to find the source of this claim—Krutch—or to comprehend the weight that the claim really carries. In the first instance (finding Krutch as source), Borges never mentions Krutch in any of his published texts in which he calls Poe neurotic. The only reference to Krutch appears in the authorial headnote on Poe that he and Bioy Casares add to the third edition of *Los mejores cuentos policiales*, and that headnote simply names Krutch's book. In the second instance (realizing the weight of Krutch's claim for Borges), Borges's statements of Poe's neurosis in print feel distinct from his judgments of Poe's literature. Only by seeing in the notebooks that Poe's supposed fear of women comes from Krutch and that this argument forms the core of Krutch's analysis can we understand that Borges's use of this terminology is a strategy that internalizes and defends Krutch's thesis, pathologizes Poe, and then tries to explain why Poe's fiction is better than his poetry and why he invented detective fiction. In other words, Borges's acceptance and dissemination of Krutch's neurosis argument becomes the catalyst and the undergirding of his broader claims about Poe's literature—Poe's troubled biography becomes his work.

Borges's full acceptance and (uncited) propagation of Krutch's argument and Borges's subsequent reading of Poe's neurosis as the cause of his choices of genre (short fiction over poetry) and choices of theme (including the fantastic and—or, even, as—detective fiction) are most visible in his October 2, 1949 "Edgar Allan Poe" in *La Nación* and in a talk he gave on Poe just a week later in San Miguel de Tucumán.³² In the article, Borges claims that "[l]a neurosis de Poe le habría servido para renovar el cuento fantástico, para multiplicar las formas literarias del horror. [...] Poe se creía poeta, sólo poeta, pero las circunstancias lo llevaron a escribir cuentos [...] sin la neurosis, el alcohol, la pobreza, la soledad irreparable, no existiría la obra de Poe" (1). The renovation of the fantastic here could be any of Poe's supernatural stories, but, as we have already seen, in Borges's vocabulary, this could also be a reference to Poe's invention of detective fiction. And, while Borges lists alcohol, poverty, and solitude as other catalysts that

32 The other significant texts and lectures on Poe in which Borges talks about neurosis repeat the approach Borges takes in this article and in this conference.

steered Poe toward his specific literary output, his previously cited insertion in the Almafuerte notes in the 1942 red Avon notebook—“La mujer, que es una forma de la soledad, la pobreza y de la locura locura”—casts the solitude and the poverty squarely as parts of the neurosis itself that are symbolically represented by the feared woman figure.

In the Tucumán talk, Borges approaches detective fiction more directly, expands on Poe’s specific neurosis by channeling Krutch’s idea that Poe feared intimacy, and puts forth (again, without citation) the idea that Poe created detective fiction to save him from his neurotic misery.

Poe [...] fue muy desdichado, un neurótico, un hombre para quien la felicidad era un imposible. Se sabía excluido del amor: de todos los compañerismos de todas las intimidades del amor. Y esa desdicha suya fue para nosotros una felicidad porque determinó su total entrega a la literatura. Cuando escribió sus “asesinatos de la calle Morgue” quiso crear un personaje que lo compensara de su soledad y su desdicha. Creó un hombre poderoso –Augusto Dupont [sic]. (“La literatura policial”)

Knowing, from the notebooks, that this set of arguments comes from Krutch emphasizes it. The neurosis claim is not a sideshow for Krutch, and with the availability of the *avant-textes*, we can see that for Borges it is also the main exhibition—something powerful enough that Borges suggests it dictates both what and how Poe writes.

Borges’s notes on Poe also make the reader—or, at least, the Poe reader—contemplate what is missing in Borges’s Poe wheelhouse compared to the Poe biographies that Borges takes so seriously. For example, where is Marie Bonaparte’s *The Life & Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*? I can find no evidence in any of Borges’s publications, any of his available unpublished notebooks, or any of his physical libraries that I have seen to this point that he knew Bonaparte’s book. Although the English translation was not released until 1949 (the very time period of the notebooks examined in this article), the French source text was published in 1933. Borges’s familiarity with and continual mentioning of Poe’s literary reputation in France—he repeatedly describes Poe’s influence on Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry—and his engagement with French literature and thought all suggest that he would have to have known this title even though he never acknowledges it. Furthermore, the visible connections between Bonaparte’s oldline Freudian approach in 1933 and the

Krutch's argument about Poe's fear of women in 1926 would seem to have brought her book into his reading orbit.

From our current perspective, Borges's lack of engagement with Arthur Hobson Quinn's 1941 *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* creates another strange absence. Well-respected in its time, this biography is still considered one of the best Poe biographies available.³³ Quinn's 1941 publication date might have made it inaccessible to Borges in the early 1940s, but by the 1949 grey Avon notebook in which he is openly citing Krutch, Borges's notes (and many of the reviews he published in *El Hogar* and *Sur*) show that he had been reading plenty of English-language books published in the early 40s. A dose of Quinn might have tempered Borges's enthusiastic reception of Krutch's theory of Poe as neurotic since Quinn often combats Allen and says of Krutch's biography, in a bracketed note in Quinn's lengthy bibliography, "Based on a mistaken theory of Poe's physical constitution" (768).³⁴

Current Poe scholars consider the biographies by Krutch and Allen, the very books on which Borges most heavily relies in his notes, and, without the open citations, in his published texts, "untrustworthy" (Kopley 76). In his recent "Poe's Lives"—a powerful essay on Poe biographies from 1877 through 2005—eminent Poe scholar Richard Kopley calls both biographers to task. He notes that Krutch employs "no scholarly apparatus at all, only the author's claims and impressions" which leads to "problems with regard to matters of fact" (76). And, the "[p]roblems with matters of fact anticipate serious problems with larger claims" (76). Kopley asserts that Krutch's "critical method is an offended obtuseness. The repeated language indicates his pathographic bias: 'neurotic,' 'morbid,' 'abnormal,' 'evil,' 'madness,' 'disease'" (76). Kopley calls Krutch's "claim" about Poe's alleged fear of women and sexuality—the very neurosis that Borges makes central to his own understanding of Poe—his "most notorious"

33 Richard Kopley avers that "*Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* is one of the essentials of Poe scholarship. It rewards study even seventy-seven years after its publication" (78).

34 Although he often corrects Allen, Quinn's appraisal of Allen's *Israfel* is somewhat kinder: "Written with spirit, but largely secondary, and with a tendency toward the romantic and the acceptance of unchecked evidence" (766). Borges's cold appraisal of Shanks's Poe biography is quite similar to Quinn's thoughts on that book: "Inaccurate in biography, no real contribution" (769).

argument and attacks it directly: “The first response is, of course, that Krutch offers no proof. How could he? The second response is that there is a tale that speaks to the ‘normal amorousness’ that Krutch denies exists in Poe’s tales—the 1841 ‘Eleonora’” (76). Kopley offers only slightly less critical words on Allen’s *Israfel*.³⁵ In both cases, Kopley’s critiques are not judgements passed against psychoanalysis or against any attempts that try to interpret or portray Poe’s relationships with women—Kopley’s mixed judgement on Bonaparte’s Poe study and his praise for Kenneth Silverman’s *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* reveal as much.³⁶ Instead, his negative appraisals of Krutch and Allen emphasize the danger of the claims they make with no biographical nor textual proof. And, as this article reveals, at least a part of that danger is that a reader as discerning and as influential as Borges can believe, adopt, refract, and multiply such claims to new and distant audiences.

Ironically, Borges’s reliance on Krutch, and to a lesser extent, Allen, leaves him open to the exact same criticism he later offered Ferrari about psychoanalytic biographies. After complaining directly about how Allen’s focus on Poe’s change of residence replaces the study of Poe’s literature and his ideas, Borges states: “o –en el caso de los psicoanalistas– se sustituye por chismes, indiscreciones sobre la vida sexual... además, se entiende que todo escritor debe odiar a su padre y querer a su madre, u odiar a su madre y querer a su padre” (“Las letras” 188). This is, precisely, the type of reading that Krutch offers. After describing Poe’s longing for his dead mother, Krutch states: “It was she too, perhaps, who stood between him

35 Kopley calls *Israfel* “seriously problematic” (76). Its “reader must expect—and be wary of—imagined passages. [...] Allen slides into speculation and faux insight. [...] Allen is weak on literary interpretation. [...] Allen is neither a sensitive reader nor a penetrating one. [...] His *Israfel* does not possess authority. One may read it indulgently or resistingly, but not trustingly” (75-76). Of Allen’s claim “that ‘the root of Poe’s misfortunes, agony, and shipwreck, as well as his power as a literary artist, lay in some inhibition of his sexual life’ and his application of ‘this view to ‘The Raven,’” Kopley states: “One wonders how Allen knows all this” (75-76).

36 Of Bonaparte, Kopley argues: “Through Bonaparte is often mistaken, we cannot dismiss her, for she is attentive to detail, and sometimes fittingly so. [...] She should be read warily, but she should be read. If her method was sometimes primitive and reductive, she was certainly a close reader” (78). He calls Silverman’s book “one of the most important Poe biographies” and suggests that “[t]he Poe that emerges from this volume is a man who never recovered from the death of his mother when he was not yet three years old, who grieved for her his entire life, and who honored her in his writing” (80).

and any normal fruition of love” (24). Then, after commenting on Poe’s grief for the death of a childhood friend’s mother, he claims that “two dead women rule his imagination, and even in boyhood these two women held him captive [. . .] there is good reason to believe that this amorous young man avoided all his life the sexual connection with any woman” (25). Krutch later claims that Poe’s marriage to Virginia Clemm—his cousin, and a child who was 14 years his junior—demonstrates “both his abnormality and the fact that he was desperately determined that it should not be admitted event to himself” (54), and he calls the relationship between Poe, Marie Clemm (Poe’s aunt and Virginia’s mother), and Virginia “double”: “They were ghostly shadows whose unreality seemed to make unnecessary the physical union which he could not offer” (55). These specifics, and many others that Krutch offers, portray a neurotic Poe who mourned his dead mother figures and feared intimacy with living women.

This claim is the same argument Borges latches onto in his notebooks, publications, and talks on Poe. After claiming that Poe is neurotic in his 1949 “Edgar Allan Poe,” Borges states: “Interpretar su obra en función de esa anomalía puede ser abusivo o legítimo. Es abusivo cuando se alega la neurosis para invalidar o negar la obra; es legítimo cuando se busca en la neurosis un medio para entender *su génesis*” (1, emphasis added). Borges’s phrasing at the end of the last sentence is beautifully ambiguous. Is it legitimate to examine the neurosis to find a way to understand the genesis of *the work*, or is it legitimate to analyze the neurosis to discover a manner to comprehend the origin of *the neurosis itself*? In the 1949 Avon notebook, perhaps we simultaneously find both answers and much more. A • near the elided “~~Lo confirman todos los hechos; no hay uno que lo excluya~~” takes the reader to a • on the preceding verso that contains a note in Leonor Acevedo de Borges’s hand that reverses the two clauses of the elided text and then elaborates as follows:

no hay un solo hecho que lo excluya; todos los hechos de la biografía del poeta lo confirman. Casi podría decirse que lo confirman todos los hechos y circunstancias del universo, como a todo hecho real. Según esta conjetura, la leyenda de Poe, el Poe de la leyenda de Poe, el Poe de las biografías románticas, sería un capítulo de la obra fantástica. El aristócrata virginiana, el huésped de vastas bibliotecas, sería un personaje de Poe, como A. G.

P. o como Berenice. Efectivamente la erudición que ostenta Poe suele ser ficticia o apócrifa.

For Borges, all facts/incidents in Poe's life and in the whole universe confirm his neurosis. And, then, the Poe of the biographers who romanticize him (the Ingrams, not the Krutches) becomes one of Poe's own characters in one of Poe's own works of the fantastic. The second half of this argument is trenchant, and not just for a romanticized version of Poe, but for the Poe created by any biographer (Krutch included). And, the critique does not have to stop with Poe biographers. Borges's idea here suggests that any author (or historical figure) becomes a fictional character (perhaps a character in his or her own works, or perhaps not) in the hands of biographers who create narrative (or, at least, readers hope they do) out of a list of "hechos" like the story that Borges makes for Poe in section 3 of the 1949 grey Avon notebook via the lists from Krutch and Allen in sections 2 and 2^A of the first Poe segment. The first half of the argument in the • note above (the idea that everything points toward Poe's neurosis), however, seems "abusivo"—not in the terms laid out by Borges since his perpetuation of a neurotic Poe created by Krutch does not invalidate Poe's work—but in the terms of Kopley and most serious Poe scholars of the twenty-first century who demand evidence of this neurosis beyond a generalized statement that Poe's whole biography proves it and an exaggerated claim that the universe itself agrees.

Finally, Borges's engagement with Krutch's interpretation of Poe in the *avant-textes* and his perpetuation of that version of Poe in his lectures and in his published texts also calls into question Borges's long-time reading of and fascination with Poe's works. Does Borges return to Poe again and again because doing so brings back memories of his childhood? Does he do so because he reads Poe as the inventor of the detective genre, a genre that Borges sees as ubiquitous and as having great (and often underappreciated) value because it offers order in a time of chaos? Or, perhaps, does he return to Poe and Poe's supposed neurosis because Borges can self-identify or empathize with Poe's alleged fear? I will not attempt to answer these questions here, but, at least in terms of the last question, it seems as though Borges's reliance on Krutch to interpret Poe might justify the critics and biographers who attempt to interpret Borges's own works by finding their genesis in Borges's often discussed fear of intimacy and/

or his relationships with his father and his mother. Several Borges biographies, and many more articles of literary criticism on Borges's texts, offer the types of readings of Borges's sexuality that Krutch offers of Poe, and a tweaked version of Borges's thoughts on Poe could certainly fit within these studies: something like "Behind Borges (as behind Poe, Swift, Carlyle, and Almafuerite) hides a neurosis." Borges's treatment of Poe biographies, in both his texts and *avant-textes*, then, offers Borges's own biographers and critics much more license than Borges's statement to Ferrari about biographies would seem to allow.³⁷

While Borges seeks for the genesis of Poe's works in his neurosis, this article has searched for the origins of Borges's biographical readings of Poe in the very genesis of his writings on Poe. Borges's *avant-textes*, especially the 1942 and 1949 Avon notebooks held at Michigan State, reveal that Borges was reading Krutch and Allen and internalizing Krutch's controversial claims about Poe's deadly fear of women. In the years that followed, Borges disseminated this understanding of Poe as neurotic to countless readers and listeners in his texts and in his talks. These notebooks show that Borges does not separate Poe's works from his troubled biography. Instead, he combines the two and argues that Poe's supposed fear of intimacy turns him from poetry to fiction and, specifically, toward the creation of an intellectual genre—the detective story—to escape the chaos of his neurotic life. In short, these notebooks require a fundamental shift in the scholarly conversation around Borges and Poe that must now pay more attention to biography (certainly Poe's and perhaps Borges's) than previous studies of the two authors (including my own) have argued.

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37 Individual Borges readers and scholars will probably not agree about which readings of Borges's supposed neurosis are "legítimos" and which are "abusivos"—which ones seek, in an exploration of the neurosis, to find the genesis of Borges's works or of the neurosis itself and which ones examine the neurosis to invalidate the works.

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