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**Record: 14****Title:** The journey to the South: Poe, *Borges*, and Faulkner.**Subject(s):** IRWIN, John**Source:** Virginia Quarterly Review, Summer91, Vol. 67 Issue 3, p416, 17p**Abstract:** Attempts to find the Southern relationship between *Borges*, Poe and Faulkner through an essay entitled 'The Journey to the South: Poe, *Borges*, and Faulkner,' by John T. Irwin. Interesting aspects of *Borges'* development as a fiction writer; *Borges'* attempt to double the origin of the detective genre; Poe's and Faulkner's influence on *Borges*; Details.**AN:** 9112162093**ISSN:** 0042-675X**Database:** MasterFILE Premier

## THE JOURNEY TO THE SOUTH: POE, *BORGES*, AND FAULKNER

One of the more interesting aspects of *Borges'* development as a fiction writer in the late 30's and early 40's was his decision to turn away from the French literary influence that represented the artistic ideal for most of his fellow Argentinians (an Argentine obsession that he was to satirize in "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote") and to turn toward English, and particularly North American, fiction as the principal foreign literary influence on his work. For the past several years I have been working on one aspect of that North American influence--*Borges'* project of doubling Poe's three detective stories with three stories of his own. *Borges* published his first detective story, "The Garden of the Forking Paths," in 1941, apparently intending it as a commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the genre. As the historian of detective fiction Howard Haycraft notes, there were "several events which marked the Centennial of the Detective Story in 1941": one was the first issue of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, another was the publication of Haycraft's own magisterial *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*. *Borges* later recalled that the English translation of "The Garden of the Forking Paths" was submitted to a contest sponsored by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and "won a second Prize."

The first Dupin story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," had of course appeared in 1841; while the second, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," appeared serially in two installments in 1842--43. *Borges'* second detective story, "Death and the Compass," was published in 1942, marking another hundredth anniversary. The English translation of this story was also submitted to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine but, as *Borges* ruefully notes, "was flatly rejected." The third Dupin story, "The Purloined Letter," was published in 1844, but *Borges'* third story, "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth," was not published until 1951. In his note to the English translation of the story *Borges* accounted for this break in the pattern, commenting that after his "first two exercises of 1941 and 1942" his third effort "became a cross between a permissible detective story and a caricature of one. The more I worked on it, the more hopeless the plot seemed and the stronger my need to parody."

*Borges'* attempt to double the origin of the detective genre by producing three stories that would appear in the centennial years of the originals gives some indication of how seriously he took Poe's influence on his work, and this naturally raises questions, which I would like to pursue here, about what drew *Borges* to Poe's work and why he was able to use Poe both as a point of access to North American literature and as a model of how one could achieve literary self-definition through a kind of antithetical regional identification. In some sense these two questions turn out to

be the same question or at least to have the same answer, for clearly one of the reasons that *Borges* as a South American was attracted to this particular North American writer was that Poe thought of himself as a Southerner. Though Poe had been born in Boston, he had been raised by his foster parents, the Allans, in Virginia, and he seems to have considered himself a Southern gentleman, even something of an aristocrat (albeit a fallen one), for the rest of his life--a regional (and social) designation that served in some degree to distinguish him in his own mind from the largely Northern literary establishment in which he moved and in terms of which he sought success.

The resemblance, not to say kinship, which *Borges* felt with Poe as a Southerner seems to have involved a whole series of similarities that flowed out of this regional designation, the most important of these being the sense of a dual military/literary heritage. The American South is, of course, a region with a strong military tradition, and in the Civil War the South thought of itself as the natural heir to the Royalist side in the English civil war--the aristocratic side whose wealth was based on land rather than commerce, whose Cavaliers were equally adept at penning a witty sonnet or making a dashing cavalry charge that either carried all before it or ended in disaster. This image of the Southerner as Cavalier, as the aristocrat who is both soldier and poet, sheds light on the career choice that confronted Poe at the age of 17 when his foster father John Allan removed him from the University of Virginia and refused to finance him any longer. Though Poe was ultimately to support himself for most of his adult life as a writer and magazine editor, he initially tried to earn his living by following a career in the military. After leaving the University of Virginia, Poe went to Boston and enlisted as a private in the army under the name Edgar A. Perry in May 1827. Poe spent the next two years in the service, ultimately rising to the rank of sergeant major, the highest noncommissioned rank. After securing a substitute, he was honorably discharged in April 1829. He then sought and received an appointment to West Point and reported for duty in June 1830.

According to his biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn, Poe felt that a military commission was the only means by which he could secure the gentlemanly status to which he had been raised by Allan but which had been denied him by Allan's withdrawal of financial support. No doubt, Poe, with his Virginia upbringing, felt as well a certain chivalric attraction to military life, and at this point he must have also thought that there would be enough free time in the Army for him to continue his writing. In addition, Poe may have been led to this career by the fact that his paternal grandfather, David Poe, Sr., had been something of a local military hero. During the Revolutionary War, Poe's grandfather had, in Quinn's words, served as "Assistant Deputy-Quartermaster General of Baltimore with the rank of major.... So well known were Major Poe's services that he became brevetted in the eyes of the public and was known for many years as 'General' Poe." Quinn adds that in his seventies "General" Poe seems to have resumed his military career and "taken part in the defence of Baltimore in 1814 against the British attack." The memory of his grandfather's services to the nation may well have influenced Poe's application to, and acceptance by, West Point, but whatever the reason for his decision, the discipline of West Point soon proved too much for the young man. Poe decided to leave and in January 1831 managed to get himself court-martialed for "Gross neglect of Duty" and "Disobedience of Orders." He departed the Academy in February and supported himself for the rest of his life as a writer, but he dedicated his Poems by Edgar A. Poe, Second Edition published in April 1831 to "The U.S. Corps of Cadets."

This passage in Poe's life must have had a special resonance for *Borges*, for like Poe he also had a paternal grandfather who was a local military hero, and he seems to have felt an attraction for both the military and the literary life. In his 1970 autobiographical essay, *Borges* recalls that his grandfather, Colonel *Borges*, was "Commander-in-Chief of the northern and western frontiers of the Province of Buenos Aires" and that in 1874 at the age of 41 he was killed in one of his country's civil wars when, riding on horseback toward the enemy lines, "he was struck by two

Remington rifle bullets." Ever the chronicler of historical firsts, *Borges* remarks, "This was the first time Remington rifles were used in the Argentine." And he adds with evident amusement, "It tickles my fancy that the firm that shaves me every morning bears the same name as the one that killed my grandfather."

The military heroes among *Borges'* ancestors were not, however, confined to his father's side of the family. In the same 1970 essay, he recalls that his maternal great-grandfather was "Colonel Isidoro Suarez, who, in 1824, at the age of twenty-four, led a famous charge of Peruvian and Colombian cavalry, which turned the tide of the battle of Junin, in Peru. This was the next to last battle of the South American War of Independence.... Another member of my mother's family was Francisco de Laprida, who, in 1816, in Tucuman, where he presided over the Congress, declared the independence of the Argentine Confederation, and was killed in 1829 in a civil war. My mother's father, Isidoro Acevedo, though a civilian, took part in the fighting of yet other civil wars in the 1860's and 1880's. So on both sides of my family, I have military forebears; this may account for my yearning after that epic destiny which the gods denied me, no doubt wisely." He adds, "I was always very nearsighted and wore glasses, and I was rather frail. As most of my people had been soldiers--even my father's brother had been a naval officer--and I knew I would never be, I felt ashamed, quite early, to be a bookish kind of person and not a man of action." But his being a bookish kind of person was also a family inheritance. As *Borges* says in the autobiographical essay, "A tradition of literature ran through my father's family. His great-uncle Juan Crisostomo Lafinur was one of the first Argentine poets.... One of my father's cousins Alvaro Melian Lafinur ... was a leading minor poet and later found his way into the Argentine Academy of Letters." And of course *Borges'* father had written a novel, as well as numerous sonnets and a translation of Omar Khayyam.

One can see *Borges* confronting his dual military and literary heritage (as well as the influence of Poe in this area) in that first story he wrote in a new manner in 1939 in the wake of his father's death and his own near death from blood poisoning, a new manner that the world would come to know as "Borgesian"--"Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote." The image of the French author Pierre Menard that emerges from what the narrator calls his "visible lifework," a bibliography of 19 items made up for the most part of symbolist poems, arcane monographs, and translations, is that of a very minor writer indeed--effete, brittle, précieux, as the French say. The career evoked by this visible work seems to be very much *Borges'* sense of what his own literary career would have looked like to the world if he had died of septicemia in early 1939--a minor poet and essayist lionized in the Frenchified literary salons of Buenos Aires society. But this visible work was not the whole of Menard's literary creation; there was an invisible work as well, a work of such sublimity in its conception that it could only be the creation of a major writer. (Indeed, part of the peculiarly poignant effect of placing "Pierre Menard" within the context of *Borges'* biography is the sense we get that *Borges* meant to evoke, in the difference between Menard's visible and invisible work, that feeling which every young writer has experienced in contemplating the possibility of his own premature death--that sense of the difference between the way his career will look to the world on the basis of the few, minor things he has published and the way that it would look if the world could see the great, but invisible because as yet unwritten, works that he had planned.)

In his invisible work Menard had, of course, set out to reproduce Cervantes' Don Quixote, not "to compose another Don Quixote,... not to produce a mechanical transcription of the original," but "to produce pages which would coincide-word for word and line for line--with those of Miguel de Cervantes." And to make his task even more difficult, Menard decided that "to be, in the twentieth century, a popular novelist of the seventeenth..., to be, in some way, Cervantes and to arrive at Don Quixote" was "less arduous--and consequently less interesting--than to continue being Pierre Menard and arrive at Don Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard."

What the narrator, who is in his own way as brittle as the Menard evoked by the visible work, seems to be most puzzled by is why someone like Menard, a minor symbolist, a connoisseur of arcana, would choose to reproduce Don Quixote, choose to emulate Cervantes. Not only is the work in a foreign language (and one which the narrator clearly feels is inferior to French), but it is crude, bawdy, filled with an earthy vitality that makes it seem doubly foreign to the world in which Menard lives. The narrator goes to some lengths to explain this choice, but we are perhaps in a better position to understand what Cervantes represented for Menard because of our sense of what Poe represented for *Borges*. For quite clearly the important fact about Cervantes in this context is that he was both a soldier and a writer (and of course compared to the Frenchman Menard, a Southerner), or more precisely a soldier who became a writer when his soldiering days came to an end, a writer who in the Quixote created a character who sets out to enact in real life the deeds of chivalrous valor that he has read about in books, which is to say, deeds that are simply literary inventions.

*Borges* goes out of his way to ensure that the reader registers that the central fact about Cervantes is his being both a soldier and a writer, a man of action and a man of intellect, when he has the narrator remark that one of the three chapters of the Quixote which Menard set out to reproduce exactly was "Chapter XXXVIII of Part One 'which treats of the curious discourse that Don Quixote delivered on the subject of arms and letters.' As is known," continues the narrator, "Don Quixote (like Quevedo in a later, analogous passage of *La hora de todos*) passes judgment against letters and in favor of arms. Cervantes was an old soldier, which explains such a judgment. But that the Don Quixote of Menard--a contemporary of *La trahison des clercs* and Bertrand Russell--should relapse into these nebulous sophistries!" The narrator explains Menard's stance in this regard by invoking "his resigned or ironic habit of propounding ideas which were the strict reverse of those he preferred." No wonder then that the narrator feels that though the "texts of Cervantes and Menard are verbally identical,... the second is almost infinitely richer."

We might attribute something of this added richness to *Borges'* story of Menard as well if we were to substitute for the figure of the minor French poet and essayist Menard, who sets out to double the work of a major Spanish writer (Cervantes), the figure of a minor Argentinian poet and essayist (*Borges*) who, at the start of his career as a fiction writer, sets out to double the work of a major North American fiction writer (Poe). After all, Poe, like Cervantes, had been at different times in his life both a soldier and a writer, and as such he probably felt, as *Borges* says of himself, a "yearning after" some "epic destiny" which his gods had denied him. It is precisely this yearning of the writer for some epic destiny, for some heroic action which the fates have withheld, that *Borges* assimilates to Cervante' debate between arms and letters, a debate that Don Quixote decides in favor of arms, but which *Borges*, who was barred from a life of vigorous physical action by his nearsightedness and frailty and who must thus try to turn a fate into a power, sets out to decide in favor of letters. And what better model for that choice of letters over arms than someone who, like Poe, had rejected a military career for the life of a writer, and what better work of Poe's to double than one that thematized the dispute between action and intellect, between physical force and mental subtlety, as the difference between a violent crime and its mental solution, between the physicality of the former (the brutality of murder) and the intellectuality of the latter? It is a difference that Poe himself emphasized in his first detective story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," for there the killer is literally a hairy ape, with the crime being marked by both fierce brutality and enormous physical dexterity, while the detective is a mastermind whose profound sedentariness is meant to contrast with the physical activity of the killer and thus highlight the detective's enormous mental superiority to all brute force.

That *Borges* thought of his story "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" as an oblique gloss on his project of doubling Poe's three detective stories with three of his own can perhaps be judged from the fact that "Pierre Menard" was published in a volume of fiction whose final story, "The

Garden of the Forking Paths," both gave the volume its name and initiated *Borges'* project of doubling the Dupin stories. Need I add that the narrator of "Pierre Menard" remarks in passing that he had always considered Menard as a writer "essentially devoted to Poe." The narrator intends his remark as an explanation of why Cervantes was an oddly inappropriate writer for the refined symbolist Menard to emulate, but of course the Poe that the narrator has in mind is the minor poet and essayist who, as he says, "engendered Baudelaire, who engendered Mallarme, who engendered Valery, who engendered Edmond Teste," the Poe whose writing could be thought of as having influenced Menard's "visible work." But the Poe that *Borges* has in mind is the major fiction writer rather than the minor poet, the Poe whose writing influenced Menard's "invisible work," the Poe whose actual influence on *Borges'* work Menard's invisible project symbolizes.

## II

It is worth noting here that Poe's influence on *Borges*--which is to say, the exemplary influence of a Southern writer working within a Northern literary establishment that provided *Borges* with a model for his own engagement with North American literature, an engagement that was, in its imitative but antithetical dynamics, to give *Borges* a sharpened sense of his own Southernness--was probably mediated and reenforced by the work of another author from the American South who was *Borges'* contemporary, William Faulkner. *Borges* was a fan of Faulkner's work, and between 1937 and 1939 he reviewed three of his books--*The Unvanquished*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Wild Palms*--and in 1941 published a Spanish translation of the last of these. Of *The Unvanquished* *Borges* wrote, "Rivers of brown water, rundown mansions, black slaves, equestrian wars--lazy and cruel: the peculiar world of *The Unvanquished* is consanguineous with this America and its history, and it is also criollo. There are some books that touch us physically like the nearness of the sea or the morning. This--for me--is one of them." One can sense *Borges'* already assimilating Faulkner's South, with its "equestrian wars," to his own south and to the image of his grandfather's death on horseback during one of the Argentine civil wars.

Faulkner's resemblance to Poe as regards a dual military/ literary tradition would, of course, have accounted in part for *Borges'* interest in him. As Poe and *Borges* both had paternal grandfathers who were military heroes, so Faulkner's paternal great-grandfather had been a hero in the Confederate army during the Civil War. William C. Faulkner, "the Old Colonel" as he was called, had led his regiment into battle at the First Manassas and come out a hero. As Faulkner's biographer Joseph Blotner describes the action, "Losing one horse and then another from under him, he was knocked unconscious but returned to the battle to earn a commendation from General Johnston. General Beauregard, seeing him remount and gallop off, was heard to shout, 'Go ahead, you hero with the black plume; history shall never forget you?'" The Old Colonel went ahead after the war to become a lawyer, planter, railroad builder, and politician. But perhaps the most interesting of his careers was as a writer. Among his literary efforts there was a long poem called *The Siege of Monterey* about his experiences in the Mexican War, a successful play entitled *The Lost Diamond*, and a moneymaking novel, *The White Rose of Memphis*. Faulkner, of course, drew liberally on his own family history for his fiction, and the four generations of Faulkner men (from his great-grandfather, the Old Colonel, down to the author) are models for both the Sartoris and the Compsons.

Faulkner's sense of the way in which one's ancestors could exercise a fateful influence on one's own life is the theme of *Light of August*, where the three main characters, Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Gail Hightower, have all had their destinies determined by the lives of their grandfathers. Given how important a figure Colonel *Borges* was in the imagination of his literary grandson, we can imagine what *Borges* must have felt about the fate of Gail Hightower, who had originally come to the town of Jefferson because his grandfather was accidentally killed there during a cavalry raid in the Civil War and who had remained in Jefferson even after his disgrace because he was doomed to relive in his imagination every evening at twilight the entrance of his

grandfather's cavalry troop into the town. That instant in time, that transitory moment of lost grandeur, had been arrested and preserved in Hightower's imagination, acquiring the status of a painting or of equestrian statuary, and that image had in turn arrested the flow of time in Hightower's life, compelling him to circle back every evening to relive, in the contemplation of that image, his grandfather's death. But just as Hightower was obsessed with the heroic death of his grandfather, so Faulkner seems to have been a bit obsessed with the military heroics of his own great-grandfather the Old Colonel, and when the chance came for Faulkner to serve in the military in World War I, his disappointment at being turned down by the Aviation Section of the U.S. Army because he was both too short and underweight, an almost literal figure of not measuring up to the stature of one's heroic ancestors, was to last his entire lifetime. Of course, Faulkner volunteered for and was accepted by the Royal Air Force, but the war ended while he was still in training in Canada. One gains some sense of how bitter a disappointment this was for him when one recalls that he volunteered for military service again some 20 years later at the start of World War II and was again turned down and that he had to content himself with telling stories to young men who were going off to fight, about his own heroic adventures as a fighter pilot in the First World War and his narrow escape from death after having been shot down behind German lines.

A literary taste that Faulkner shared with both Poe and *Borges* was, of course, his evident predilection for the detective story. Faulkner is a major inheritor of Poe in this genre--Absalom, Absalom! representing in some sense the culmination of the Gothic detective story that was begun by Poe with the three Dupin tales. And as we know, Faulkner practiced the genre with a certain regularity: his efforts included the novel *Intruder in the Dust*, the short story collection *Knight's Gambit*, and the screenplay for Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, on which he collaborated with Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett. One can perhaps see most clearly Faulkner's influence reenforcing that of Poe in *Borges'* third detective story, "Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth," where the situation of the two young men puzzling over the facts of a very old murder and constructing alternative stories to explain what really happened is strongly reminiscent of the situation of Quentin and Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!* And in a sense *Borges'* self-definition as a writer depended upon his ultimately convincing himself of that very fact which Quentin, in the city of Poe's birth and his own death, never seemed able to convince himself--that he didn't hate the South.

### III

*Borges'* most explicit examination of his own "southernness" as a writer, and consequently a particularly instructive instance of the influence of Poe on his work, is to be found in the short story with which he ends the 1956 collection *Ficciones*--"The South." In the preface to the collection *Borges* says that "The South" is "perhaps my best story" and that "it can be read as a direct narrative of novelistic events, and also in another way." One "other way" in which it can be read is as a figurative account of *Borges'* career as a writer. Like *Borges* at the time, the story's main character Juan Dahlmann works at a small municipal library in Buenos Aires, and, like *Borges'*, Dahlmann's ancestors were military heroes: "His maternal grandfather had been that Francisco Flores, of the Second Line-Infantry Division, who had died on the frontier of Buenos Aires, run through with a lance by Indians from Catriel." Dahlmann's paternal grandfather had been a German emigrant; but Dahlmann had always "considered himself profoundly Argentinian," for though there was a "discord inherent between his two lines of descent," Dahlmann "(perhaps driven to it by his Germanic blood) chose the line represented by his romantic ancestor, the ancestor of the romantic death." Dahlmann had inherited a ranch in the South that belonged to the Flores family, and he had managed to save it "at the cost of numerous small privations" over the years. The ranch represents the South for Dahlmann, and the South represents the core of Dahlmann's nationalism by being associated with his heroic ancestor Francisco Flores who was killed by the Indians. As the narrator says, "An old sword, a leather frame containing the

daguerreotype of a blank-faced man with a beard, the dash and grace of certain music, the familiar strophes of Martin Fierro, the passing years, boredom and solitude, all went to foster this voluntary, but never ostentatious nationalism." The opposition that *Borges* draws in the tale between the urban north and the rural south, between Buenos Aires (as a city of emigrants and the descendants of emigrants, a city of imitation Europeans) and the pampas (where all those traits that are distinctively Argentinian are to be found) amounts to a symbolic geography in which the journey to the South will be acted out.

Though Dahlmann had not seen the ranch in many years, "he contented himself with the abstract idea of possession and with the certitude that his ranch was waiting for him." And in February 1939, an accident and its aftermath lead him to make a trip to his property in the South. The accident that *Borges* gives Dahlmann is taken from *Borges'* own biography; it is that near brush with death from blood poisoning that I mentioned earlier. As *Borges* describes it in "An Autobiographical Essay," "It was Christmas Eve of 1938--the same year my father died--that I had a severe accident. I was running up a stairway and suddenly felt something brush my scalp. I grazed a freshly painted open casement window. In spite of first-aid treatment, the wound became poisoned, and for a period of a week or so I lay sleepless every night and had hallucinations and high fever. One evening, I lost the power of speech and had to be rushed to the hospital for an immediate operation. Septicemia had set in, and for a month I hovered, all unknowingly, between life and death. (Much later, I was to write about this in my story 'The South.')

When I began to recover I feared for my mental integrity.... I wondered whether I could ever write again. I had previously written quite a few poems and dozens of short reviews. I thought that if I tried to write a review now and failed, I'd be all through intellectually but that if I tried something I had never really done before and failed at that it wouldn't be so bad and might even prepare me for the final revelation. I decide I would try to write a story. The result was 'Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote.'" *Borges* evokes the episode as a kind of symbolic death and rebirth: in the wake of the death of his father (whom he had always considered the fiction writer in the family) and his own near death, the old writing self (the minor poet and reviewer) is transcended and the new writing self (the fiction writer) comes into existence.

Like *Borges*, Dahlmann had also run up a flight of stairs (he had been hurrying home to examine "an imperfect copy of Weil's edition of *The Thousand and One Nights*"), had felt something graze his head ("the edge of a recently painted door"), had gotten blood poisoning from the wound, and had been carried on the point of death to a sanitarium where after several weeks of fever and delirium he had eventually recovered. But where *Borges* on his recovery wrote a short story (a story in which Menard's work of doubling the *Quixote* is a figure for *Borges'* work of doubling Poe's detective stories), Dahlmann on his recovery makes a trip to the South. This parallel equates the journey to the South with the act of writing, in particular, with the attempt at some new type of writing, some imaginative exploration. And here again we see the influence of Poe, for in several of his best known stories Poe figuratively represents the act of writing as an exploratory journey into terra incognita, into some new realm of the human imagination. And in two of these--"MS. Found in a Bottle" and *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*--where virtually every aspect of the act of writing is metaphorized, the exploratory journey is specifically a journey to the South, an attempt to reach the South Pole. In both stories, the central character tries to reach the limits of the imagination, tries to gain, as the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" says, "some exciting knowledge--some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction." And both the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" and Arthur Gordon Pym die in the quest, but with this difference. Where the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" dies during the course of the journey when his ship enters the polar abyss, Arthur Gordon Pym dies some ten years after the journey during the writing of his narrative, dies at precisely that point in the narrative at which he should have died in the journey (i.e., when his canoe enters the polar abyss), but which he had survived in some unexplained manner. The displacement of the main character's death from the journey of exploration to the act of writing makes clear the metaphoric status of the journey itself.



Like the journeys of Arthur Gordon Pym and the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle," Juan Dahlmann's journey to the South turns out to be fatal. Riding the train to his ranch, Dahlmann occupies himself by reading the first volume of *The Thousand and One Nights* that he had acquired on the day of his accident, feeling somehow that he is "traveling into the past and not merely the south." Disembarking at a station near his ranch, Dahlmann becomes involved in a senseless quarrel in a care with three drunken toughs, and one of them challenges him to a knife fight. Dahlmann knows that he should refuse, that he does not have a chance, but he has chosen the life of the South and part of that life is this death. Dahlmann is without a weapon, but suddenly an old gaucho--"in whom Dahlmann saw a summary and cipher of the South (his South)--threw him a naked dagger, which landed at his feet. It was as if the South had resolved that Dahlmann should accept the duel.... He felt that if he had been able to choose, then, or to dream his death, this would have been the death he would have chosen or dreamt."

The fact that Dahlmann has been reading *The Thousand and One Nights* on his journey reminds us that it was a favorite work of *Borges'*, though it is probably being invoked here as an allusion to Poe's Pym. In his 1975 collection *The Book of Sand*, *Borges* names as one of his models in writing the stories in this volume "Poe, who, around 1838, gave up a very rich style in order to bequeath us the admirable final chapters of his Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym." Of course, "the admirable final chapters" of Pym recount Pym's voyage to the south, a voyage that ends with Pym's canoe being swept, "under the influence of a powerful current," toward the South Pole and toward that gigantic white figure in the mist that, as the text hints, is Pym's own unrecognized shadow. One of the two tales from *The Thousand and One Nights* that *Borges* says Dahlmann read on his southern journey is the story of "the magnetized mountain," the opening of the Third Kalandar's Tale recounting King Ajib's marvelous voyage to the west. Blown off course during a storm, Ajib's ship is caught by a strong current that carries it toward the Magnet Mountain, a gigantic lodestone that wrecks ships by drawing the nails from their planks and that bears on its top the figure of a bronze horseman which Ajib must topple. According to Burton, Arabic legend located the Magnet Mountain, with its bronze horseman, in the Fortunate Isles or Eternal Isles, i.e., the Canaries, depicting it as a kind of western limit of the world. The broad similarities between Pym's voyage to the south and Ajib's to the west--the fact that the direction of each voyage is the polar opposite of the direction associated with the voyager's culture; the powerful current that captures each boat; the attractive force of the polar abyss and the Magnet Mountain; the gigantic white figure and the bronze horseman--all suggest that the reference to the story of "the magnetized mountain" in "The South" may well be an oblique evocation of Poe's Pym as an influence on Dahlmann's southern journey. And this possibility seems even more likely when we recall that Poe, an admirer like *Borges* of *The Thousand and One Nights*, published in 1845 a parody entitled "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" which recounts the aged Sinbad's last voyage, his voyage to the modern West as a prisoner on board an English steamship. The point of the tale is that the scientific and technological marvels of the West far surpass the Eastern marvels that fill the Arabian Nights. As the list of these amazing Western phenomena mounts, Scheherazade's husband the king becomes more incredulous and angry until he finally orders that his wife be strangled with a bowstring--the true ending of Scheherazade's own story, says Poe. If *Borges'* reference to the tale of the magnetized mountain is indeed an allusion to Poe's parody of the voyage to a polar opposite and those other Poe voyage tales that lie behind Dahlmann's southern journey, then it is an allusion which seems to say, "As the western storyteller Poe has served the eastern storyteller Scheherazade, so the southern storyteller *Borges* will serve the northern storyteller Poe." Need I add that the other tale from the Arabian Nights which *Borges* says Dahlmann read on his journey to the South was that of "the genie who swore to kill his benefactor," for of course what *Borges* learned from Poe, how to achieve his own originality by making the most of his southernness, would be put to its ultimate test in establishing his difference from a major North American writer, Poe. Thus it is that in *Borges'* second detective story, "Death and the Compass," the criminal concludes his intellectual duel with the detective, who, says



**Borges**, thought of himself as "a kind of Auguste Dupin," by trapping and killing him at the fourth point of the compass, which is to say, in the South.

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By John T. Irwin

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