

# **The Reader as Detective: Intertextuality in Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives***

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## **Abstract**

Born out of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories about the amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin, the genre of detective fiction centers itself around the phenomenon that is the detective character. A contemporary example of detective fiction, Roberto Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*) is a first-person narrative told in three parts about the lives of two poets, Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima, and their investigative search for the mysterious founder of a poetry movement. Despite being the protagonists of this search, however, Arturo and Ulises are never actually present in the text. By inverting the two-story narrative structure established by Poe and hiding his protagonists throughout a multitude of narrative voices and intertextual literary references, Bolaño is not only able to foreground Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of social heteroglossia; he is also able to place the reader in the role of the detective. Through a focused analysis of the role of the detective in literature, I hope to show how Bolaño—drawing upon Poe and upon the influence of his Latin American literary predecessor, Jorge Luis Borges—transforms the detective reader into a confused witness, and thus, reinvents the detective genre according to its postmodern and Latin American context.

## **Introduction**

As the book's title blatantly indicates, Roberto Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*) could be considered a work of detective fiction. Yet, how exactly it is to be considered such might be an issue in need of some clarification. A first-person narrative told in three separate

parts, *The Savage Detectives* is about the lives of two poets, Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima, and their investigative search for the mysterious founder of a poetry movement, Cesárea Tinajero. Despite the protagonists being referred to as detective poets throughout the novel's existing criticism,<sup>1</sup> the lives of Arturo and Ulises continue to be read most often in regard to the author's own autobiography rather than in any terms of the detective's investigative search.<sup>2</sup> Such readings, while provocative in their own way, ignore the fact that in many respects Bolaño builds this detective narrative using the conventions of a literary genre that was first established by Edgar Allan Poe in 1841.<sup>3</sup> But whereas Poe ostensibly placed his detective, C. Auguste Dupin, at the center of his detective texts, Bolaño, in an inversion of the conventional detective story, hides Arturo and Ulises throughout a variety of narrative voices, observations, and intertextual literary references. Consequently, in never actually allowing the story of his two detective poets to be presented in a coherent manner, Bolaño is not only able to foreground what semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin would have called the social heteroglossia surrounding both the detective as well as the detective genre;<sup>4</sup> he is also able to place the reader, rather suggestively, in the role of the detective. Drawing upon Poe, and upon the influence of his own literary antecedent, Jorge Luis Borges, Bolaño eventually turns the detective from a reader of clues into nothing but a confused witness.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Bolaño shows that the reader, when displaced into the late twentieth-century Latin American setting, often gets lost in a labyrinth of languages and literatures, i.e., caught in a complexity of clues, signs, and meanings that he/she does not know how to read.

### **Poe and Bolaño – Origins of the Detective**

“As a teenager, I went through a phase when I only read Poe”

—Roberto Bolaño, *The Last Interview*

It is widely recognized that Edgar Allan Poe became the progenitor of the detective genre in 1841, when he published the first in a series of three short stories about the amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin.<sup>6</sup> Although it could hardly be said that Poe's three detective stories were strictly built according to the procedures of a convention that did not yet

exist, it is possible to see in Poe's works the conceptual and narrative underpinnings that would go on to shape, reflect, and follow—although not in any prescribed way—future productions of the genre such as Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*. Granted there exist great conceptual distances between the world of the short story and that of the novel, it is in the narrative sense that one can begin to understand how and where Bolaño's detective text re-sources, reinterprets, and re-informs the genre according to its late twentieth-century postmodern context. For these purposes, a rich understanding of the narrative constructions of Poe's detective texts becomes essential to any productive reading of Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* as detective fiction.

From the narrative perspective, each of Poe's detective stories functions rather simply. Consider, for example, Poe's first detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."<sup>7</sup> Widely regarded by most of the genre's critics and historians to be the first of its kind,<sup>8</sup> "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" revolves around C. Auguste Dupin—literature's very first crime-solving detective—as he attempts to decipher, from a variety of news reports, the mysterious and brutal murder of two women—a one Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter—committed on the street of the Rue Morgue in Paris, France. In its narrative presentation, it is important to distinguish the plot of Poe's detective story from the narrative story it actually tells. Such a difference between plot and story, however, might be difficult to apprehend without the appropriate theoretical groundwork. In her book on narrative theory titled *Narratology*, Mieke Bal defines story as "a fabula [that is, a series of logically or chronologically related events] presented in a certain manner" (5). Thus, where plot might only refer to the main events of a text as they occur, story is the actual ordered arrangement of related events as they are presented in the text. In this sense, one can see that "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is actually constructed of two distinctly separate yet intimately related stories. First is the story of Dupin's investigation as it is told by Dupin's personal friend, the unnamed character narrator of the story. Second is the story of the crime, which the detective Dupin sets out to discover through his investigation. Narratively speaking, because the events in the story of Dupin's investigation transpire for the very purpose of discovering and,

eventually, presenting the story of the crime, the events in the story of the crime are until then, by the very nature of the detective genre, paradoxically told without manner. So while there are two stories in “The Murders of the Rue Morgue,” one of those stories, that being the story of the crime—insofar as its events are hidden from view—is absent from the text. Given that the very word “detective” derives from the Latin *dētegere* (to uncover, to reveal), it is at this point, with the presupposed absence of the story of the crime, that Poe’s detective Dupin can begin his detective work.

Much like “The Murders of the Rue Morgue,” Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* can be read according to the same two-story narrative structure. Yet, unlike Poe, rather than hide the story of the crime for the purpose of uncovering it, Bolaño instead builds the mystery of his detective text around the presupposed absence of the story of his detectives. For example, the first character narrator of the novel is captivated by the shroud of mystery surrounding the detective poets: “Then I saw their faces emerge from the smoke. It was Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano” (19). It is for this reason that, in the narrative sense, differentiating the plot of Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* from the story it actually tells is a far more difficult task than it proves to be for any of Poe’s detective texts. To begin with, the novel is composed of three separate and arguably disjunctive parts. The first part, titled “Mexicans Lost in Mexico (1975),” assumes the form of a journal written by the young poet Juan García Madero, who narrates the story of his developing involvement in an avant-garde poetry movement headed by Arturo and Ulises, enigmatically known as Visceral Realism. The second part, titled “The Savage Detectives (1976-1996),” is a cacophonic collection of interviews and retrospective stories told by various character narrators on the subject of their own lives as they overlap and intersect with the lives of Arturo and Ulises. The third part, titled “The Sonora Desert (1976),” is a continuation of the first, as Juan García Madero, together with a prostitute name Lupe, joins Arturo and Ulises in the search for Cesárea Tinajero while simultaneously fleeing retribution from Lupe’s pimp. Despite the fact that each of these three sections relentlessly refers back to the story of the detectives and their investigation, of the throng of stories actually presented in each part, there exists a narrative

incapability on the part of each story's narrator to present, in full, the complete story of Arturo and Ulises. Instead, what is presented is a collective series of accounts and speculations, that is, a multitude of voices in seemingly irreconcilable contention with regard to the mysteries of who the detective poets are, what they are doing, and, most importantly, why they are doing it. In this sense, just as the story of the crime is hidden in Poe's detective texts, the story of the detectives' investigation is hidden in Bolaño's.<sup>9</sup>

### **Bakhtin and Bolaño**

“Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse towards the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life”

—Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel”

In “Discourse in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin puts forth a general theory of the novel which argues that the historical process through which language comes into being is always and at once social in its dimensions. For Bakhtin, because the novel develops historically through acts of verbal presentation or narration, it is the quintessential literary form through which the social dimensions of language are actualized. “The novel,” Bakhtin states, “always includes in itself the activity of coming to know another’s word” (353). This conception of the social dimensions of the novel exhibits a sense of what Bakhtin calls social heteroglossia—the stratification of a language into a multitude of voices, dialects, meanings, and belief systems. Although the operating effects of social heteroglossia are not always readily apparent within a novel, Bakhtin argues that they are nonetheless deeply embedded within the context of the novel’s verbal presentation. In fact, according to Bakhtin, without the presumed existence of a heteroglossia of voices to form the necessary contextual background, the nuances of the author’s voice could neither be articulated nor perceived. Bakhtin did not, however, only use the term to highlight the multiplicity of contexts surrounding and underlying the novel. He also used it to indicate that the language of the author is itself

stratified and heteroglot in all levels of its expressiveness, “shot through” with a variety of different voices, intentions, and beliefs that are not his/her own. When Bakhtin, therefore, defines heteroglossia as “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (324), he does not do so to simply point out or explain the momentary appropriation of another’s speech by an author. Rather he does so to designate the very dialogic struggle for authority that always occurs between two others—author vs. author, author vs. narrator, narrator vs. character, and so on—as they and their intentions intersect at the dually-expressive point of the word.

When looking at Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives*, it becomes clear that the multitude of narrative voices and stories that comprise the three parts of Bolaño’s text share the very same principles of stratification outlined in Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia. However, instead of working to create the contextual background upon which the primary story of the novel is told, in Bolaño’s detective text, the heteroglossia of voices within the novel are foregrounded to the effect that they completely envelop the primary detective story. A similar situation occurs in Poe’s detective texts, as the social heteroglossia of each text arises in response to the hidden story of the crime. In an article titled “The Detective as Reader,” narratologist Peter Hühn explains the development of this social situation in terms of reading. “The initial crime—as long as it remains unsolved—functions as an uninterpretable sign, that is, one that resists integration into the established meaning-system of the community” (454). Because the crime cannot be accounted for by the community as a whole, variations in belief arise within the community with regard to the crime’s speculative nature. Soon the very notion of community is disrupted, as community members begin to describe the same reality of the crime, and of its surrounding events, in entirely different terms—using a shared language system yet using it in a variable and conflicting manner. The hidden story of the crime, thus, serves to reveal to the community its own stratification, as it does, for example, in “The Murders of the Rue Morgue” where the detective Dupin (who is himself a member of the community) first encounters the mystery of the crime through a variety of contradictory witness accounts collectively reported in the evening edition of the *Gazette des Tribunaux*.

In Poe's detective texts, this only goes so far as to call forth the presence of the detective, whose very purpose is to solve the crime and therefore deny the disruptive and stratifying effects it has had upon the community. However, in Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*, there is no detective to fulfill such a role. In fact, the only detectives within the text are Arturo and Ulises, the very missing characters who are at the center of the socially stratifying mystery. Without a detective to uncover the hidden story of the detectives' investigation, the reader of *The Savage Detectives* is left to assume the role of the detective for him/herself.

### **The Reader as the Detective**

“They [the police] consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass”

—C. Auguste Dupin, “The Purloined Letter”

Placed in the role of the detective, the reader of *The Savage Detectives* faces a certain challenge in that he/she must not only discover the hidden story of the investigation, but must also know the process by which to do so. The question of what consists of the detective process, however, is a matter of debate in and of itself. Poe, for one, referred to the process as “ratiocination” (to reason, or the process of reasoning) and did not necessarily apply it exclusively to the detective. Similarly, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of English literature’s most famous detective Sherlock Holmes, had his detective describe the process using the equally ambiguous term “rational deduction.”<sup>10</sup> It appears, however, that in Bolaño’s detective text, the detective process is less associated with a general method of reasoning than it is—as most detective historians and critics have come to realize—with a specific method of reading. And as with any act of reading, the method by which a detective reads the mystery of the crime presupposes the existence of a text. Defined by Bal as “a finite structured whole composed of language signs” (5), the term “text” is the most basic term used to refer to any object that can be read. While the parallels drawn between the detective’s process of

investigation and the act of reading might, in a traditional sense, seem unclear, fortunately for the reader of *The Savage Detectives*, the specifics of the detective process are actually demonstrated by Arturo and Ulises when they read, for the first time, Cesárea Tinajero's only published poem.

The story of the detectives' encounter with Cesárea's poem is told in sections throughout the second part of the novel by an old poet named Amadeo Salvatierra. Titled "Síon," the poem that Amadeo presents to Arturo and Ulises is unlike any other conventional poem in that it is written in an entirely visual form. That is to say that "Síon" contains no written words outside of its title and that the three lines that constitute the poem are all represented quite literally as thin horizontal lines drawn on a page, each with a small rectangle placed on top and arranged in a cascading sequence that progresses from straight line to wavy to jagged.<sup>11</sup> For a character like Amadeo, the poem as a whole is indecipherable, as he explains to Arturo and Ulises, "boys, I've been looking at it for more than forty years and I've never understood a goddamn thing" (398). Arturo and Ulises, on the other hand, react differently to the poem, as they are more intrigued by its mystery than they are confounded by its cryptic form. After dozing off and giving Arturo and Ulises more time to investigate the poem, when Amadeo awakes to ask the two boys "what's the mystery?" (399), like the true detectives that they are, Arturo and Ulises respond with total confidence: "there is no mystery, Amadeo" (399). It is at this point that the detective poets then begin to guide Amadeo (and the reader) line-by-line through the process by which they appear to have arrived at the poem's hidden meaning. What is interesting about this process, however, is not so much the revelatory conclusion that the detectives eventually arrive at as is the deceptiveness entailed in their guiding of Amadeo through its proceedings.

Despite the outward appearances of the moment, in their instructional gesture, the detectives do not in fact afford Amadeo the same opportunity to read the poem as they had. As a preamble to revealing their method, the detectives first ask Amadeo to "forget the rectangle, pretend it doesn't exist. Just look at the straight line" (422). In doing so, what Arturo and Ulises are asking Amadeo to do is recognize

each line (beginning with the first) as its own readable language sign, i.e., a symbolic representative of an object that is independent of its surroundings and that is hereto unknown. Only after cognitively removing the rectangles from the poem do the detectives then prompt Amadeo to take the necessary logical step so as to determine, or guess, what originary object each line by itself refers to, as they proceed line-by-line, asking him “What do you see?” (422). While this retroactive method of reading described by semiotician Charles Peirce’s theory of abduction (Harrowitz 182) might seem to be a reasonable way of breaking the poem down and simplifying it so as to guide Amadeo, using small abductive leaps, to draw the same conclusion the detectives had, the process in fact operates upon the false assumption that Arturo and Ulises likewise derived their conclusion by strictly adhering to the poem’s individual symbols.

The key difference between the detectives’ actual reading method and Amadeo’s can be understood according to detective critic Umberto Eco’s conception of abduction.<sup>12</sup> In “Horns, Hooves, Insteps,” Eco suggests that Peirce’s theory can actually be subdivided into three different types: overcoded abduction, undercoded abduction, and creative abduction (206). Depending upon the contextual circumstances of the situation, each of the varying types is necessitated in order to infer a coherent conclusion from (however limited) the amount of information available. When, for instance, Amadeo posits that the first line could represent the horizon or the edge of a table,<sup>13</sup> his commonplace conclusions show that he is making what Eco calls undercoded abductions—meaning that he only has to select from a range of equally probable conclusions “put at our disposal by world knowledge” (Eco 206) the objects that could possibly be represented by a straight, horizontal line. When Arturo and Ulises read the poem as a whole, on the other hand, they are required to think outside the bounds of social convention. In fact, it is because the mystery of the poem already defies being explained by world knowledge that they must make what Eco calls a creative abduction—*inventing*, as it were, from the very beginning of the mystery, their own conclusion (207). In this sense, after having led Amadeo through each line, when Arturo and Ulises reveal to him the poem’s meaning by drawing little sails on each of the rectangles,<sup>14</sup>

claiming that “hidden behind the title, *Sión*, we have the word navigation” (424), it becomes clear that, contrary to what they ask Amadeo to do, the detectives arrive at their conclusion through an act of innovation, that is, by reinventing Cesárea’s poem in their own words.<sup>15</sup>

Much in the same way that Arturo and Ulises present Amadeo with a reinvented version of Cesárea’s poem, Bolaño presents the reader with numerous scenes of literary reinvention. That is to say many of the intertextual literary references made throughout *The Savage Detectives* are built into the novel in such a way that they come to occupy a central position in the unfolding narrative. One scene, for instance, transpires in which the narrator, a poet/lawyer named Xosé Lendoiro, watches as Arturo descends to the bottom of a mountain chasm in order to rescue a young boy. After realizing that the events he witnessed mirrored those he once read in a short story by Pío Baroja titled “The Chasm,” Xosé has an epiphany: “the story I was living was just like Baroja’s story and that Spain was still Baroja’s Spain” (458). Besides highlighting the reference upon which the scene was built, Xosé’s thought betrays the surreal and uncanny quality of his own reinvention—that is, the fiction-like quality of his actual, lived experience.<sup>16</sup> And just as Xosé realizes that his version of Spain is wrought from another’s, the reader of *The Savage Detectives* too must realize that the world of the novel in which he or she hopes to discover Arturo and Ulises is neither entirely comprehensible, nor is it wholly self-contained. In other words, compounded in the reader’s investigation are not only a heteroglossia of voices operating within the novel (characters, narrators, and author), but also a heteroglossia of voices that continue to operate outside of the novel’s internal structure (readers, critics, translators, other authors, other characters, and other texts).

While Xosé, the lawyer,<sup>17</sup> faces his realization with a degree of discomfort and unfamiliarity, in another scene, the narrator—this time a Visceral Realist poet and close friend of Arturo’s named Felipe Müller—addresses the issue immediately with regard to its principle ambiguity, that being, namely, the question of authorship. The scene in question consists in the retelling of a Science Fiction story about which Felipe explains: “It’s by Theodore Sturgeon, or so Arturo said, although it might be by some other author or even Arturo himself; the name

Theodore Sturgeon means nothing to me" (447). While Felipe goes on to recount the story in full, he does not do so without first declaring his overarching suspicion of and ultimate disregard for the author's assumed authority over the story. Preferring instead to associate the story and its potential for meaning with his memory of Arturo,<sup>18</sup> Felipe's retelling is indicative of the debate—which at this point has become inherent to the novel's form—regarding the importance of the author's position versus that of the reader's.

Further proof of the primacy of this debate can be detected in the reference to Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Brise Marine" that is repeated throughout the novel.<sup>19</sup> The poem's first identifiable appearance is in the journals of the young poet Juan García Madero, who, after meeting Arturo and Ulises and joining the ranks of the Visceral Realists, excitedly remarks upon the event with a line—"every book is out there in the world waiting to be read by me" (7)—that bears a resemblance to the opening line of Mallarmé's poem: "The flesh is sad—and I've read every book" (Mallarmé 25). In its second appearance, the reference is again to Mallarmé's opening line, as midway through *The Savage Detectives* Amadeo Salvatierra tells Arturo and Ulises a story about Diego Carvajal, Cesárea's former boss, a man who after sex liked to "think about postcoital sadness, that vexing sadness of the flesh, and about all the books he hadn't read" (377). While these first two scenes vaguely confer upon the thematic links between reading, sex (García Madero is a virgin), and desire, it is not until the poem makes its third appearance near the novel's end—when Arturo recites "Brise Marine" in its entirety in order to explain a position he takes in regard to his love life—that Bolaño presents, direct and unfiltered, the resolute lack of desire for and boredom with sex and books expressed in the poem's opening line.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, it is here, where the poem is most clearly referenced, that the author's words create the most confusion, igniting a debate between Arturo and the narrator of the scene, a woman named María Teresa Solsona Ribot. "[T]he person who wrote that is full of shit," María argues, "[h]e probably hardly slept with anybody . . . And I'm sure he didn't read all those books he bragged about reading either" (547). For all practical purposes, María is right in her suspicion. No one could read every book in existence. Yet, as Arturo maintains his faith in the

possibility of exhausting the world's supply of sexual partners and books, the disparity between each character's reading of the poem reveals more than just the ambiguous nature of the statement in question; it also accesses, in a circuitous fashion, the characters' essential differences, as the attempt to decipher the author's intentions, and thus the poem's meaning, ultimately finds its reply in the readers themselves.<sup>21</sup>

### **Borges and Bolaño – The Confused Witness**

“It is true that Erik Lönnrot did not succeed in preventing the last crime, but he did, indisputably, foresee it”

—Jorge Luis Borges, “Death and the Compass”

As Bolaño employs each intertextual reference and speculative thought to create an infinite succession of divergent and uncertain paths of meaning, one is necessarily reminded of the image of the labyrinth that reoccurs throughout so many of the essays, short stories, and poems of Bolaño's Latin American literary predecessor, Jorge Luis Borges.<sup>22</sup> In drawing this parallel between Borges and Bolaño, one would also be remiss to forget the fact that Borges wrote his own trio of detective stories based upon the exploits of Poe's Dupin<sup>23</sup> and that in one of these stories titled “Death and the Compass,” Borges' detective, Erik Lönnrot, in the attempt to solve the mystery of a crime, finds himself navigating (both literally and figuratively) the “pointless symmetries and obsessive repetitions” (153) of a labyrinth in the form of the Villa Triste-le-Roy. For Lönnrot, the investigation into the labyrinth delivers him (as intended) to the scene of the crime, which in actuality turns out to be the unsuspecting and inescapable scene of his own murder. Similarly, for the reader of *The Savage Detectives*, the investigation into the labyrinth of the novel delivers him or her (as is ultimately intended) to Arturo and Ulises' first encounter with Cesárea Tinajero, in what appears to be the final scene of their investigation.

But is this really the investigation that we have arrived at? While everything in the novel up to this point would certainly lead us to believe so, the story of the detectives' investigation is actually cut short when Lupe's pimp (a man simply known as Alberto) and the corrupt

policeman he travels with arrive upon the scene. “We found Cesárea Tinajero,” explains García Madero, “[i]n turn, Alberto and the policeman found us” (639). The details of the events that follow—as narrated by García Madero who remains safely in the car with Lupe, removed, as it were, from all of the event’s happenings—are explained in no certain terms. Apparently, as Arturo and Ulises are confronted by Alberto and the policeman, a scuffle breaks out that leaves three of the five characters involved (Arturo, Ulises, Alberto, the policeman, and Cesárea) dead. Although not much could be said about this scene without unnecessarily giving away the ending of the novel, it does become clear that rather than reveal to us the story of the investigation, Bolaño instead delivers us unwittingly (lost as we were in the labyrinth of our own investigation) upon the scene of the crime. It is in this sense that Bolaño transforms the reader of *The Savage Detectives*—as one who was unable to deduce that it was from this crime that the disruptive and stratifying effects of heteroglossia experienced throughout the novel originated—into being nothing but a confused witness.

## Conclusion

With the stories of the detectives’ investigation hidden until the end and the story of the crime apparent from the beginning, we come to the point at which Bolaño accomplishes, through a complete foregrounding of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, the total inversion of the narrative structure established by Poe’s detective texts. However, to end with a mere recapitulation of the points and ideas that have made such an inversion possible, and which have been shown throughout the course of this essay, would be excessive. Thus, rather than do so, I will instead end with a series of speculations regarding the fundamental implications of those ideas as they are influenced by the final moments of *The Savage Detectives*.

In the sense that, even with the story of the crime revealed, so little is known as to why the detective poets sought to find Cesárea Tinajero, it could ultimately be said that the mystery surrounding the story of Arturo and Ulises’ investigation remains, in the end, completely unsolved. Then again, given that within a timespan of twenty years none of the narrators within the novel—despite being so multifarious and at odds with one

another—ever suspected that a crime had even occurred, it might also be possible to say that the story of the crime is itself a mystery that remains, at least in terms of the community, completely unsolved as well. In either case, as the reader’s investigation comes to a close (although can we really say that the case is closed?), we are without a doubt prompted by our final revelation to return to the beginning of *The Savage Detectives* for the purpose of re-experiencing, as detailed in the journals of the young poet Juan García Madero, what is now clearly none other than the genesis of the crime. For these reasons, I am led to believe that perhaps Bolaño is suggesting, in the tradition of Borges, that it is only when the reader is confronted with and confused by the infinite complexity of the word that the true investigation—an investigation which, for Bolaño, has less to do with individual characters and more to do with literature and its Latin American surroundings—can begin.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> See Goldman, “The Great Bolaño.”

<sup>2</sup> In “Bolaño in Mexico,” Carmen Boullosa remembers the literary culture in Mexico City that inspired *The Savage Detectives*; in “Portrait of the Writer as Noble Savage,” Howard Corral examines Bolaño’s place within the context of the Latin American literary canon; in “Arts of Homelessness,” Alberto Medina derives a reading of Bolaño’s *oeuvre* from the author’s exilic past.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in “Roberto Bolaño’s Ascent,” Ilan Stavans disregards the presence of Poe: “The novel (is that what it is?) feels like a tribute, if not a rewriting, of Jorge Luis Borges’s fictitious review-cum-short-story “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim” (that revolved around an invented Bombay attorney and involved a search in which the searcher and the object of the search are the same). In similar fashion, *The Savage Detectives* was a stepchild of Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*, a playful novel that asks to be read in multiple ways, each allowing for a different narrative structure” (Stavans).

<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

<sup>5</sup> For more regarding the Borges and Bolaño connection, see Reinhardt, *Surplus and Horror: Problems of Representation in the Fiction of Jorge Luis Borges and Roberto Bolaño*.

<sup>6</sup> See Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*.

<sup>7</sup> Poe, *The Essential Poe: Tales of Horror and Mystery*.

<sup>8</sup> I am operating on the assumption that this story is in fact the very first detective story. There is actually a relatively small faction of genre critics and historians who contend that there are earlier stories—those that involve the solving of a puzzle or mystery such as Voltaire’s “Zadig”—which should be recognized as the genre’s first example. Despite operating upon this assumption, however, I intend to formulate, through my discussion of

Bolaño's text, my own argument as to what makes a detective story, and thus why Poe's text should be considered the first.

<sup>9</sup> Bolaño's decision to hide the story of the investigation is part of a greater strategy constituted in the complete inversion of the narrative structure established by Poe. While this would assume an inversion of the story of the crime as well as that of the story of the investigation, for my own strategic purposes, it is best to delay any comment on the nature of the story of the crime and its inversion within the text until the full narrative implications of the former have been considered.

<sup>10</sup> Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

<sup>11</sup> See image on page 398 of Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*.

<sup>12</sup> Eco is also well-known for being the author of *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*), a critically acclaimed detective novel published in 1980.

<sup>13</sup> “A straight line, I said. What else is there to see, boys? And what does a straight line suggest to you, Amadeo? The horizon, I said. The edge of a table, I said” (422).

<sup>14</sup> See image on page 423 of Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*.

<sup>15</sup> Among murder, violence, reading, and desire, repetition and reinvention have been key ideas around which the detective story has been structured since its beginnings. In fact, in his reading of Poe's “The Purloined Letter,” Jacques Lacan famously collapsed the figures of the detective Dupin and the criminal of the story, Minister D—, into a single figure due to the similarity of the position and perspective they both hold within the framework of a repeated yet divergent situation: “[Both the Minister's and Dupin's] glance presupposes two others, which it embraces in its vision of the breach left in their fallacious complementarity, anticipating in it the occasion for larceny afforded by that exposure” (44).

<sup>16</sup> Only later, after rereading Baroja's story, does Xosé come to grasp, with horror, the immense extent to which his faith in his own identity has been destroyed: “[I] immersed myself once more in the desolation of “The Chasm.” When I finished I closed my eyes and thought about the men's fear . . . Then I closed the book and paced around my office like a caged lion, until I couldn't stand it anymore, and I threw myself on the sofa, curled up as tight as I could, and let my lawyer's tears, poet's tears, and giant's tears flow all at once” (468).

<sup>17</sup> A criminal lawyer no less, Xosé has a penchant for speaking in Latin clichés derived from classical philosophy: “*ius est ars boni et aequi*” [law is the art of the good and the equitable]; “*libertas est potestas faciendi id quod facere iure licet*” [liberty consists in the power of doing that which the law permits]; “*nescit vox missa reverti*” [the word, once spoken, cannot be withdrawn] (*The Savage Detectives* 452).

<sup>18</sup> As it turns out, Felipe's suspicion may be justified. Rumor has it that the story Arturo claims to have read is based on the short story by Theodore Sturgeon titled “When You Care, When You Love.” Provided this is true, what Arturo then fails to mention to Felipe is that the actual story by Sturgeon, which was originally intended to be a novel but was ultimately left unfinished, only provides the beginning premise (about rich woman who

attempts to clone her recently deceased lover) that Arturo, through a fabrication that is all his own, finishes.

<sup>19</sup> Notably, the late nineteenth-century French symbolist poet, in addition to translating Poe into French, was also the author of the poem “The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe.”

<sup>20</sup> “How could anyone declare that the flesh is essentially sad, that *la petite mort*, which doesn’t last even a minute, casts a pall over all lovemaking, which, it is widely known, can last for hours and hours, and go on interminably? Such a reading is quite at odds with the work and life of Mallarmé, which are indissolubly linked, except in this poem, this encoded manifesto. And the claim to have read all the books make even less sense, because although books themselves may come to an end, no one ever finishes reading them all, and Mallarmé was well aware of that,” - Roberto Bolaño (“The Writer is Gravely Ill”).

<sup>21</sup> On a related note, Roland Barthes pointed out that “Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner. For him, for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author” (Barthes).

<sup>22</sup> See Williamson, *Borges: A Life*

<sup>23</sup> See Kristal, “Invisible Work: Borges and Translation” for further discussion of Borges’ translations and reinterpretations of Poe’s works.

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