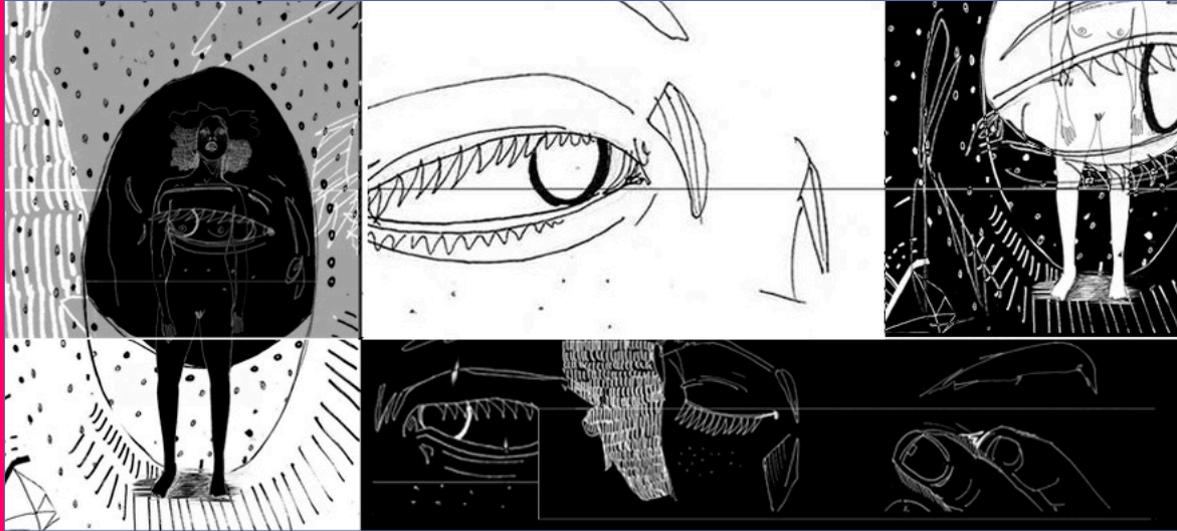


# AGONIZING AWAKENING AND DESPAIR IN THE FACE OF DEATH: TRACES OF POE IN “DESTINO” BY ALBERTO GARCÍA HAMILTON<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** || This paper examines the tale “Destino” by the Uruguayan journalist Alberto García Hamilton, published in 1898 in the feuilleton section of the newspaper *El Orden*, in Tucumán (Argentina), and its connection with tales that revolve around death and the figure of the “living dead.” These tales are his principal source of inspiration. «Destino» is part of a literary tradition that supports the problematic of the catalepsy as a disease or as a persistent supernatural phenomenon in the literature and in the cinema of 20th century. To begin the analysis of this tale, we consider the influence of Edgar Allan Poe’s works in Argentina’s literary system at the end of the 19th century.

**Keywords** || Alberto García Hamilton | Comparative literature | Premature burial | Edgar Allan Poe | Argentina’s literature

*Entendemos que la mayor prueba que un hombre capaz de producir por sí mismo da de admiración y simpatía hacia un autor, es la de imitarle o traducirle*  
Juan María Gutiérrez

## 0. Introduction. Voices from beyond the grave: popular belief, medical problem, and literary thematization

Stories about ghosts, being buried alive, and the living dead form part of the literary corpus known as “fantastic tales,” that is to say, fictional texts whose themes converge on the controversial collective belief in the unsettling—and traumatic—coexistence of the everyday with the supernatural. Furthermore, stories about cases of catalepsy are frequently linked to the theme of the dead brought back to life and enter into the problematic of ghost stories in relation to a gothic literary tradition, whose written testimony dates back in Europe to antiquity and, in Latin America, to the era described as Discovery and Conquest of America.<sup>2</sup>

In historical compendiums of medicine and psychiatry, the stories of catatonia as an illness and catalepsy as one of its more frequent symptoms, form part of a problematic for which medicine will take responsibility in its disciplinary development and in various moments of progress in psychiatric research, as Max Fink and Michael Taylor demonstrate (2003).

In the strictly literary sphere, criticism is in agreement in drawing attention to and studying Edgar Allen Poe as one of the authors who narrates this infirmity with a kind of obsession in his stories, constituting one of his favorite topics (Gonzalez-Rivas, 2011: 498; Castillo, 2010: 18; Čadová, 2007: 154; Philippov, 1999: 108; Sánchez Verdejo Pérez, 2014: 106; Hernández Vicente, 2006: 93 and 98; Urdiales Shaw, 2012: 72-73; among others). In this sense, let us recall the character of Berenice, who, in the tale of the same name, suffers from a degenerative illness identified by the author as catalepsy. The terrifying effect derives not only from the fact and the possibility of confusing the cataleptic state with actual death, which prompts the family to mistakenly bury a living person, but also from the final revelation of the tale, when Berenice’s teeth fall out of the medical kit of the protagonist, who has been shown on numerous occasions to be obsessed with them. The horror lays in the macabre exploitation on the part of the cousin-husband<sup>3</sup> and the confusion between the two states: the appearance of the illness of his cousin-wife and actual death. By allowing for the realization of the premature burial, the crime becomes apparent and is revealed quickly through the desecration of Berenice’s tomb in search of the sacred object, the teeth, whose whiteness symbolizes the desired purity and beauty.

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### NOTES

1 | A first approximation to this theme was presented, under the title “Narrar la muerte desde la tumba: ‘Destino’ de Alberto García Hamilton y sus vínculos con los relatos de muertos vivos,” at the *XI Jornadas Nacionales de Literatura Comparada*, organized by the Department of Humanities at Universidad Buenos Aires and the Department of Languages at Universidad de Belgrano, June 16 and 18, 2014, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

2 | Ana González-Rivas Fernández (PhD dissertation, 2011) work on the connection between Greco-Latin classics and the gothic novel notes this relationship. For my part, an approximation of this question was developed, with Martino (2013), in the presentation “Narrativización de la catalepsia en el mundo latino” and the article “*Desine, iam conclamatum est*”. Relatos sobre la *muerte aparente* en el mundo romano” (2014). On the association between the concept of the fantastic with the discovery of the Americas, see López Martín (2006: XIV).

3 | Berenice is the cousin of the protagonist and later his wife, which demonstrates Poe’s fondness for the topic of sexuality tormented by latent incest in conjunction with morbid necrophilia manifested by the sensuality of the cadaver and the sick.

Not only does the horror of premature burial constitute fiction material for Poe, but also the aversion produced by the contemplation of the traumatic return to life of those who find themselves on their deathbed. In the tale "Ligeia," the second wife of the protagonist, Rowena, suffers from an illness apparently similar to that of Berenice. There are indications of this in the story of the reviving of the body and in its constant relapse into states of serious rigidity with a scene very similar to cataleptic episode. The end, according to Rolanda Costa Picazo, supports two readings, one of which the phantasmagorical dilutes the possibility of the effects of catalepsy and Ligeia, revived through the corpse of Rowena, materializes in the horror of the denouement returning as a *révenante*;<sup>4</sup> or, in accordance with a more rational reading, it demonstrates the delirium and the state of hallucination of the protagonist.

Among Poe's tales, the one that describes the terror of being buried alive with the greatest precision is, as we know, "The Premature Burial" (1844), to which we will return later in a comparative analysis with a tale by Alberto García Hamilton.

In Argentina's cultural field, horror stories about being buried alive are a product of a network of meanings in the popular imaginary articulated discursively based on ostensibly real cases, recorded in medical manuals from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (XIX) (cf. Ballariu, 1867), in fictional stories (cf. "La hora de secreto," Lojo, 2012: 167-179 and 269-270), as well as histories of cemeteries and guide books (cf. Zigiotta, 2009: 344-349). In these texts, stories of the dead brought back to life are related to the era of the plague, a moment in which there was a common practice of involuntary burials of those still living. Furthermore, cases are recorded of premature burials as a result of confusion of rigidity from catalepsy with actual death, a consequence of the prevailing ignorance of the time of the treatment of the illness. These narratives form part of a corpus of folkloric tales found frequently in guidebooks of cemeteries of large cities, as Buenos Aires. By way of example, we can cite the famous case of Rufina Camaceres, daughter of the writer Eugenio Cambaceres, buried alive ostensibly in a cataleptic state (Zigotto; Lojo; López Mato, 2012: 253-254).

In the strictly literary field, the influence<sup>5</sup> of the work of Poe in Latin America, according to David Roas, appears from 1879 through translations published in Argentinian, Mexican, Chilean and Colombian magazines and newspapers (2011: 37-38). Roas notes the volume of poetry translated from English by Guillermo Stock, edited by *La Nación* in Buenos Aires in 1890. In line with this, and paraphrasing Englekirk and Roas, Andrea Castro maintains that, at the end of the of 1850s, Poe begins to be translated into Spanish under the decisive influence of Baudelaire's famous prologue and

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4 | *Révenante*. "[...] la que, arrojada de su morada, vuelve una y otra vez, porque los muertos nunca mueren del todo, especialmente Ella" (PEDRAZA, P. [2004]: *Espectra. Descenso a las criptas de la literatura y el cine*, Madrid, Valdemar, p. 16, cited by Hernández Vicente, 2006: nota 6, p. 93)."

5 | "Influence" is a theoretically complex term, as exemplified in the debate synthesized by E. Ibsch in the following question: "[...] ¿hay que entender por 'influencia' los vínculos literarios basados en contactos verificables ('relaciones de hecho') o bien se puede aplicar también el concepto cuando se constatan rasgos comunes sin que haya ningún contacto efectivo?" (2009: 287). The discussion has continued, even though influence theorists of positivistic bend have imposed, as it is known, their "demasiado unilateral" vision, basing influence "en la función de la fuente, de la obra o del autor que [la] ejercieron" (288). Ibsch recalls D. Durišin's contribution to comparative theories "cuando él hace de la instancia receptora, y no de la instancia influyente, el elemento que determina el tipo de influencia," centering on reception. In the present work the term "influence" is not used in a positivist sense, but rather in a loose sense, in its proximity with theories of reception, although the term does not belong to this specific field. This work revolves around the intersection between these theories and sociological and cultural studies in general. On the discussion of the use of the term "influence" in literary theory and comparative studies, see Ibsch (2009: 287-289).

his version in *Histoires Extraordinaires* (1856). Without providing concrete examples of these first translations, Castro enters into the Latin American field by affirming, with Englekirk, that only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when these translations begin to be published in the daily press, one can recognize the weight of Poe's work (Castro, 2008: 101). David Roas signals the year 1858 as a crucial point for the first translation of Baudelaire's *Histoires Extraordinaires* into Spanish by Pedro Antonion de Alarcón (2011: 41). This same year, the Spanish writer, according to Roas, published a highly favorable commentary to the Baudelairean version of Poe's work, entitled "Edgar Poe" (*La Epoca*, September 1, 1858). The objective of the article is evident: to demonstrate the meaningful repercussions of the reception of this version in the European public, and the growth of interest among readers in Barcelona and Madrid, in order to promote, the edition of his translation of the French version.

In Argentinian literature, Poe's presence is not only established from the works of Leopoldo Lugones and Rubén Darío, references cited by Costa Picazo (2010: LVIII-LX) and Roas (2011: 157-158). According to Pedro L. Barcia, this influence was inevitable and can be confirmed much earlier than the arrival of Darío to Argentina in 1893 and the explicit interest of Lugones through his poetry. This influence can be seen in the successful reception of his work disseminated and promoted through sections of feuilletons of Argentinian newspapers from 1860 on, a space in which the translations of Poe's texts were produced as well as critical reviews of his life and work (2010: 292).<sup>6</sup> The first translations of Poe's narrative work published in Argentina, "El escarabajo de oro" ("The Gold-Bug") and "Los crímenes de la calle Morgue" ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue"), according to Barcia, appeared in *El Nacional* of Buenos Aires between February 18<sup>th</sup> and March 7<sup>th</sup>, and April 2<sup>nd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of 1860, respectively. These stories are characterized by Costa Picazo, according to Barcia, as part of "fantástico de los lindes" (2010:288), as they are in genre limits of the fantastic—which for Andrea Castro constitutes the "fantástico ambiguo" (2001). These are bordering works, also, because they include a rational or natural explanation and a supernatural alternative, along with a narrator who seeks the complicity of the reader (Costa Picazo, 2010: XXXIII and XXXIV).

In Argentina, not only do the sections of the newspaper feuilletons in Buenos Aires constitute a formal sample of this interest in Poe's fantastical stories, but also the same sections of these newspapers which propose, in some cases, their own translations. As an example of provincial newspapers interested in disseminating Poe's work, Barcia notes *El Eco de Córdoba*, which published a version by José Ramón Allesteros of "The Raven" (June 12<sup>th</sup> 1874), "la primera intentada en nuestro país" (2010: 297); in the Argentinian Northeast, Barcia mentions the publication, in *Tucumán*, of "Canto de Egar [sic]

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## NOTES

6 | Barcia's statements originate from a text published by the Argentinian Academy of Letters that gathered his impressions of the 2010 Colihue edition of Edgar Allen Poe's *Cuentos Completos* by Rolando Costa Picazo.

Poe” (num. 891, Friday September 6<sup>th</sup> 1878, p. 2) “sin nombre de trucidador, más que traductor” (Barcia, 2010: 297).

For Barcia, 1879—the same year that Roas considers significant for the introduction of Poe in Latin America, according to what is cited above—constitutes a decisive date for the dissemination of Poe’s work in Argentinian culture, considering that this is the same year in which *La Biblioteca de Buenos Aires* published translations by Carlos Olivera of various stories of the North-American writer (2010: 297). The critic also notes Olivera and Edelmiro Maer as the most committed propagators of Poe’s work in Argentina at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their translations take as their point of reference Baudelaire’s French version. In this sense, what happens in Argentina is part of a larger phenomenon that is already happening in Latin America: on the one hand, access to Poe through Baudelaire’s translations; on the other, the production of a “post-Baudelaire” version of Poe, integrated into the French symbolism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Castro, 2008: 100). In effect, Barcia affirms the noticeable influence of Baudelaire on Olivera’s 1884 version, a volume which includes the famous biographical note on Poe made by the French author (2010: 301). Baudelaire’s prologue on Poe’s life and Poe’s work constitute, for Castro, the undeniable point of departure which is supported by the criticism and future translators (2008: 101).

In turn, in this study of the literary tensions in the press of Northeastern Argentina, specifically in the Tucumán province at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, we encounter Poe’s stories published in the newspaper feuilleton section such as *El Republicano* (“La carta robada”/ “The Purloined Letter” in 1881) and in *El Orden* (“El Cuervo”/ “The Raven” in 1884<sup>7</sup>), without any indication of the name of the translators. Not only are the North-American writer’s stories published there, but also apocryphal stories falsely attributed to Poe, without any mention of the primary source, nor questioning the authority or faithfulness of the translation. Thus, Thursday November 12<sup>th</sup> 1885, *El Orden* publishes “La canción de Hollands” as “Un cuento inédito de Edcar Poe” (sic). John E. Englekirk’s essay “The Song of Holland’s, An Inedited Tale Ascribed to Poe” (1931) outs the story and seeks to demonstrate its false attribution to Poe, whose original author would be Aurélien Scholl. Englekirk takes the text published by *La América* on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1883, and compares it with Sholl’s article published in the following issue of the same newspaper, corresponding to October 28<sup>th</sup> 1883 entitled “Un sueño de Edgardo Poe” contrasting the styles and assessments which lead the critic to demonstrate without a doubt the hoax perpetrated by the French author.

Furthermore, Rafael Olea Franco notes as proof of interest in translating Poe in Mexico from the French versions, the 1872

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## NOTES

7 | The translation of this poem published in *El Orden* of Tucumán in 1884 could be the same version which appeared in the Cordoba newspaper mentioned earlier. A volume which collects the translations of Carlos Olivera in the same era did not include the aforementioned poem.

publication in *El Domingo* of "La canción de J.S. Hollands," "[...] anunciado como 'cuento inedito' de Poe" (2012: 546). The initial warning of the tale leaves more doubts about this attribution, as it clarifies, as Olea Franco notes, that the translator, Gustavo Baz, had to obtain the French version from the Parisian newspaper *La Liberté* to translate it into Spanish. This episode escapes Englekirk's study in the previously mentioned article. In the case of the reproduction of this tale published in *El Orden*, we can confirm that this is the same story produced by Englekirk in *La América*. We do not know if this subsequently lead to any comparison or link between this story and the one translated by Baz in 1872 and published in the aforementioned Mexican newspaper.

Additionally, among the 19<sup>th</sup> century Argentinian writers influenced by Poe's works and criticism, Barcia mentions Miguel Cané, Antonio Argerich, Carlos Monsalve and Eduardo L. Holmberg. Regarding this last author one can recognize the traces of the tale "Ligeia" in his novel *Nelly*. This statement becomes less significant given that in the list of the favorite authors listed by the narrator, Poe is not included but another follower of the fantastic read widely in this era: E.T.A. Hoffman.

In Holmberg's short novel, published in the feuilleton of *La Prensa* in 1896, the character Nelly comes back as ghostly apparitions. Her final appearance seeks to restore the lost balance caused by her own situation. Although she dies of an illness called, in the text, "hysterical telepathy" or simply deadly hysteria (Holmberg, *Nelly*, 1896: 54)—an allusion to an illness the symptoms of which include cataleptic rigidity (Fink and Taylor, 2003: XV)<sup>8</sup>—her condition worsens because of certain events (the kidnapping of her child as vengeance for her infidelity to her lover) that torment her to her final death. Her ghost haunts the character Edwin, her husband, who, after Nelly's final fleeting return, in the privacy of the tomb, recovers the lost physical and mental equilibrium. The final revelation of the novel corresponds to the typical model of ghost stories which uncover mysteries with emerging political elements—here the supernatural gives important clues to help solve a crime (Setton, 2014). In this way, Holmberg's story shares with Poe's work the characteristic generic ambiguity and revolves around the limitations of the fantastic. Furthermore, this generic flexibility, in the case of Nelly, does not appear to suggest problems for contemporary critics,<sup>9</sup> similarly to another text of the same author, *Dos partidos en lucha*, by the young Miguel Cané in 1876 (Gasparini, 2012: 282 ).

With respect to the presence of Poe in the stories by Argentinian authors, Barcia mentions the Cordoban author Carlos Romagosa, who reproduces in the 1898 *Joyas poéticas americanas* two English texts by the North-American author, "The Raven" and "The Bells," as

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## NOTES

8 | Max Fink and Michel Alan Taylor note that Karl Ludwig Kahlbaum used, in 1874, "catatonia" as a synonym for hysteria. Holmberg probably would be familiar with this identification, as there are similarities in the story between Nelly's illness and the catatonic symptoms. This illness was originally named by Kahlbaum as *das Spannungsirreseis* (2003: XV).

9 | In the introduction to *Nelly*, Joaquín V. González "destaca el carácter de pura ficción del relato" (Gasparini, 2012: 288).

well as translations by J. Perez Bonalde (Venezuela) and Domingo Estrada (Guatemala) (2010: 307).

After this brief tour through the striking influence of Poe on Spanish literature, we turn now to a tale by a relatively unknown writer-journalist, which presents traces of readings of Poe: “Destino” by Alberto García Hamilton, a Uruguayan based in Argentina since 1898.

*The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague.*  
Edgar Allen Poe

## 1. Death after a *premature burial*, a question of *destiny*

“Destino” was published in the feuilleton section of the Tucumán evening newspaper *El Orden* of March 14<sup>th</sup> 1898, penned by Alberto García Hamilton, in a single installment. The theme of premature burial that dominates the tale suggests a possible influence of Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Premature Burial” (1844), originated, probably, in the reading of translations or rewritings of the same topic that proliferated in the daily press of the period. My hypothesis is based on two observations: In the first place, the theme treated in both stories addresses one of Poe’s favorite obsessions, based on the fear of burial and death: being buried alive and dying in the desperate attempt to free oneself from the tomb, being conscious, suffocating and torn apart. In the second place, the title of García Hamilton’s tale refers to another persistent belief in the majority of Poe’s short stories: the idea of a destiny related to catalepsy, which polemicizes the scientific knowledge and medical advances of the period and with the belief in the infinite power of healing of man and his capacity to master nature.

It would not be strange that García Hamilton would have read Poe’s aforementioned text if we take into account that the stories of the North American author had been circulating through the Latin American press directly translated from the English by anonymous aficionados or through reproductions of the French translations that the same Spanish and Argentinian writers-translators circulated around the end of the decades of the 1850s and 1870s.

Furthermore, the case of “The Premature Burial” (published originally in *The Dollar Newspaper*, Philadelphia, July 31<sup>st</sup> 1844, p.1) is particular. According to Roas, this tale was not translated into French by Baudelaire in *Histoires Extraordinaires* in 1856, but rather appears the 1859 Spanish version under the title “Enterrado vivo.” According to the aforementioned study, the first French translation of the tale was published in 1854 in *Le Mousquetaire*, whose director

was Alexandre Dumas, in a translation by William L. Hughes as “Enterré víf.” This version was reedited in 1862, the reason for which Roas suspects that the 1859 Spanish version by Pedro Antonio de Alcarón corresponds to the translation of Hughes’ version (2011: 43-44)

In Latin America, as we noted earlier, Spanish translations circulated as much as French and English versions as well as local ones by anonymous fans who frequented the daily press. According to Castro—following Venuti, Wilson, Panesi and Alvstad—, this translation of translators in Latin American countries, particularly in Argentina since the years of independence, generated the idea of “culturas amistosas y abiertas a la traducción” (2008: 99). Castro recognizes that, in the case of Argentina, this friendly attitude is selective, with preferences for Anglo-American cultures (2008: 99, note 6). However, Castro does not comment on the Francophilia that predominated the Argentinian literary field for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evident in the direct reading of French works, in most cases the second language of the political and social elite of the period.

This picture presents a heterogeneity of translations of Poe’s work which circulated in the Argentinian literary field resulting in a difficulty to identify the first translation that inspires a writer to rewrite or justify a thematic choice or a particular topic through the influence of reading, except for the explicit declaration of certain writers. In the case of this work, given the lack of declarations of this type, we can only conjecture around a possible reading of Poe’s story as inspiring a basis for the topic of García Hamilton’s tale. It revolves around the idea of destiny in the accidental premature burial which constitutes the common denominator of both stories, with different final resolutions. At the moment of the publication of García Hamilton’s tale (1898), an ample variety of translations of Poe’s poetry and tales circulated. Thus, the influence of Poe on García Hamilton by means of reading is not only possible but also quite likely. The permanence and thematic transcendence of Poe’s stories is not only apparent in the rewritings and direct translations, but also in the trajectory of possible readings and in the concrete literary-journalistic task in a newspaper. In effect, García Hamilton worked in *El Orden*, the same newspaper that reproduced translations of Poe’s texts, which reinforces our hypothesis of influence by reading.

Taking into account this model of influence, we analyze the tale “Destino” and compare it with Poe’s original English text, as there are not explicit declarations regarding the Spanish or French versions to which the Uruguayan journalist had access to.

The tale “Destiny” begins with a scene of a doctor at the moment of the declaration of death of Rafael, the protagonist of the tale.

It then narrates the burial in a brief and concise form, which in its characteristics corresponds to imaginary representation of the “ceremonial tradicional de la muerto en el lecho” (Ariès: 2012). The ceremony is taken from a Western, Christian, and Medieval period. It is a public event, in which a dying man lays in his deathbed looking upwards and, in this position, utters the arrangements for his heirs and debtors, and his dying words to those around him: friends, relatives, acquaintances. Such crowded scenes provoked the indignation and protest of late 18<sup>th</sup> century hygienists and the questioning of these social practices. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this ritual was modified, a moment in which the emotion and pain of the survivors was placed at the forefront and the act became more intimate and familiar (Ariès, 2012: 56).

García Hamilton’s tale maintains certain elements which refer to this traditional ritual of death, with 19<sup>th</sup> century modifications: the event takes place in a bedroom where the deceased lies in his deathbed—up to here consistent with the traditional ritual—and then, in the wake, the body is surrounded by relatives who mourn his passing—at this point we can recognize the mark of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it revolves around the sentiments of the loved ones:

El médico tomó el pulso a Rafael, auscultó el corazón y meneando fríamente la cabeza, exclamó con ceño adusto: ¡Todo ha concluido! Cuatro cirios daban, poco después, amarillentas claridades a la sala. Una mano piadosa cerró los ojos del cadáver y en torno del ataúd depusieron lágrimas y flores los deudos, los amigos y la prometida del que acababa de espirar.  
(AGH: “Destino,” *El Orden*, Tucumán, 14/03/1898, p. 1)<sup>10</sup>

At nighttime, after the burial, when the family leaves the cemetery, a struggle begins between life and death, which climaxes with the awakening of Rafael, the apparent corpse, in the interior of his coffin.

Death is represented in its allegorical macabre aspect, carrying out a dance with a scythe in a hand over Rafael’s tomb, who does not resign himself to losing the battle:

El letargo perdurable cimentaba su trono sobre las lápidas heladas, y la parca invencible, la horrible parca de descarnados brazos y órbitas huecas, parecía flotar en el céfiro húmedo y frío. Sin embargo, la segur despiadada agitábase embravecida entre una tumba, donde había sentido un hálito de vida. La lucha era sin tregua! Rafael había abierto los ojos, pero su mirada sin luz no pudo romper el velo de las tinieblas. Movi6 los brazos y sintió sus manos sujetas a un crucifijo. Rompió las vendas que las tenía oprimidas y al intentar llevarlas a la frente golpeó la tapa de la caja funeraria.  
(AGH: “Destino,” *El Orden*, Tucumán, 14/03/1898, p. 1)

The principal tension of the tale is manifested when Rafael realizes

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## NOTES

10 | The name of the author has been abbreviated as AGH. We respect the spelling of the original text in all citations.

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that he is in a coffin, a situation that torments him. He begins to feel in his body and brain the effects of asphyxiation by confinement, combined with a series of feelings associated with panic. These feelings and thoughts are described according to parameters of naturalist verisimilitude as demonstrated in the following phrases: “Un escalofrío recorrió su cuerpo”; “sintió que toda la sangre se le empapaba en el cerebro”; “En sus huesos penetraba un frío de muerte y su frente se empapaba en sudo helado” (AGH: “Destino,” *El Orden*, Tucumán, 14/03/1898, p.1).

As we can observe, García Hamilton narrates the fear of the dying man buried alive, which could be evidence of a possible reading of Poe’s tale “The Premature Burial.” According to this thesis, the second text represents a discussion of the ironic question of destiny: while for Poe the obsession of his character brings him to a ridiculous and humorous situation to the denouement—his premature burial is only a bad dream—García Hamilton reverses the formula and develops the idea of tragic irony of the final destiny, death, from which man cannot escape. The originality of García Hamilton’s tale resides in this convergence between comedic irony and tragic irony.

Furthermore, García Hamilton crystalizes for the northern Argentinian public, and in fiction, the persisting idea of the North-American author “To be buried while alive, is, beyond question, the most terrific of these extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality” (Poe, 1844: 1).

In effect, Rafael appears to have been buried prematurely because of a typical episode of catalepsy, the kind that takes place in tales like “Berenice” and “The Premature Burial.” Most of all in this final tale, the combination of narration and essay on the theme of mistaken burials of the ill who suffer from catalepsy or another time of illness which manifests in a kind of rigidity is a demonstration of the protagonist’s obsession with the idea of being buried alive. If it is true that in the text of García Hamilton the illness is not mentioned by name, the initial episode of the doctor who declares the dead with a minimal inspection of the body appears to be similar to what happens in Poe’s stories. What is interesting in the plot of this tale is not illness in itself, explicitly mentioned in “Berenice” and “The Premature Burial,” whose protagonists and their families know they suffer from this illness, the central point is, in the case of “Destino,” the effective materialization of this fear. In Poe’s tale, this fear concludes in a nightmare and does not end up being an obsession of the protagonist, while in García Hamilton’s tale, the denouement is fatal through the development of the torment who someone who is effectively buried alive.

Furthermore, it appears that both texts are structured around the limits of the fantastic, presenting an apparent ambiguity. In Poe’s

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tale, the confusion between the dream state and the delirium during a cataleptic attack and reality is uncovered at the end of the tale, when the protagonist awakes in a narrow bed which gives him the impression of the narrowness of a coffin. The ambiguity of García Hamilton's tale resides in the moment during the delirium, the hallucination by asphyxiation and the loss of the pre-mortal conscienceless. This moment is presented as a possibility of liberation from the grave, with the renewed hope of escaping from the tomb by vanquishing the wooden barriers of the coffin. But the tale demonstrates immediately signs of a situation without escape, a delirious nightmare:

Frenético volvió a apoyarse sobre los crueles muros que le estrechaban, y la tabla crujió. El ataúd se abría... El mundo no había concluido aún. La vida estaba allí...

Rafael saltó de aquel lecho de torturas... Pero no vio la luz que sus ojos buscaban espantados. Siempre tinieblas, rodeándole sin piedad! Siempre la impenetrable oscuridad, semejante a la boca del Averno! Y siempre el ambiente frío del sepulcro.

Dio un paso, las piernas le flaquearon y su cuerpo extenuado por la fatiga fue a caer sobre un cajón carcomido por la acción de los años. Su rostro golpeó las tablas, —que cayeron deshechas—, y chocó con los huesos de un esqueleto descarnado.

(AGH: "Destino," *El Orden*, Tucumán, 14/03/1898, p. 1)

In this way, García Hamilton's text presents another fictional possibility that coincides with the following statements in Poe's tale: in the first place the narrator maintains "Fearful indeed the suspicion, but more fearful the doom" (Poe, 1844: 1)—where the term "doom" can be translated as "fatalidad, destino"; in the second place, this same idea, which persists throughout the entire tale, is made explicit at the end: "But, alas! What avails of vigilance against the Destiny of man?" (Poe, 1844: 1). Note that the term "destiny" (practically identical in its Spanish translation) is also emphasized in the original, which reinforces the obsession of the protagonist with this concept.

In Poe's tale, the excess of precaution in order to avoid an unexpected destiny brings the protagonist to extreme measures which secure his liberation from the tomb according to the models of German *Totenhäuser*, such that tying a cord to the finger of the corpse connected to a small bell which would ring at the slightest movement of the recumbent and indicating any suspicion of life in the tomb. This custom, which also took place in Argentina during Sarmiento's presidency (López Mato, 2012: 251-252), is not represented in García Hamilton's text, because the protagonist does not imagine that he could be buried alive. In effect, the Uruguayan journalist's tale brings to the fore the idea of the doom of destiny—that cannot be conquered not even by the desire to survive—to its extreme. In the fight between life and death, the latter, even with the designs of the protagonist, triumphs.

While Poe's text is resolved with humor and questions the belief in

fate and the concept of destiny, García Hamilton's tale exposes the seriousness of death and the determinism of the fatal situation which conquers human will. It does not constitute a rewriting of Poe's tale, but rather demonstrates a possible reminiscence in the adoption of a topic already common in the period: death through premature burial determined by the force of destiny. Furthermore, we recall that the question of destiny, while persistent in Poe's work, does not constitute an original trait, as it refers to a literary Romantic tradition which finds in drama, contemporaneous to the North-American writer, an ideal manner of expression. In this sense, it is worth remembering the Duque de Rivas' *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835).<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Final considerations

This brief survey of the motivation for the topic of premature burial in fantastic literature does not claim to investigate questions of genre and its differences from "fantastic ambiguity." With this paper, I attempt, on the one hand to recover a completely forgotten text from Argentinian literature; and, on the other hand, to locate this tale in a cultural and literary tradition, recognizing thematic filiations. Accordingly, I introduced "Destino" by Alberto García Hamilton in its thematic and narrative proximity with Edgar Allen Poe's "The Premature Burial." The former, obviously, is a result of experimental writing that develops recurring ideas in the text and the work of Poe, encapsulated in the chosen title. Being buried alive is treated, fundamentally, as a question of "Destiny."

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### NOTES

11 | For a study of Romantic Spanish drama, see Michaela Peters (2012).

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