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In thy most need to go by thy side.

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FICTION

TALES OF
MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION
BY EDGAR ALLAN POE · INTRO-
DUCTION BY PÁDRAIC COLUM

EDGAR ALLAN POE, born in Boston, U.S.A., on 19th January 1809. Brought up as an adopted child; educated in England and Virginia. Abandoned a business career; was dismissed for neglect of duty from West Point Academy (1831), and thereafter supported himself by writing. Most of his life was spent in poverty, and he died on 8th October 1849 in Baltimore.

#91346

TALES OF
MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION



EDGAR ALLAN POE

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INTRODUCTION

I

WHEN we say that Poe's imagination moves amongst exceptional things, we imply that he is familiar by temperament with the matter proper to the brief narrative or tale. The tale, on account of its brevity, is precluded from expounding facts and experiences that are socially important; therefore it deals with the exceptional—with something that arrests our curiosity from the start. It was a French critic, M. Brunetière, who noticed the social insignificance of the incident upon which the tale is based; and he has pointed out that the material for the tale is to be sought in "certain peculiarities or variations of passion, which, though physiologically or pathologically interesting, are socially insignificant," and M. Brunetière goes on to say that the incident is never taken out of the mainway of life, but out of its border—"things that happen on the margin," M. Brunetière says suggestively.

That phrase "on the margin" admirably describes the whole of Poe's imaginative work, his verse as well as his prose. It is marginal, not central; it comes, not out of the mainway of life, but out of the border of existence. Poe gives us experiences that are on the margin of sanity, or on the border of unconsciousness. He reports, with extraordinary literalness and lucidity, the last swoon of the nerves, as in the passage where he describes the sensations of one who has just been sentenced by the Inquisition.

"The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy, indeterminate hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of *revolution*—perhaps from its association in fancy with the burr of a mill wheel. This only for a brief period, for presently I heard no more. Yet, for a while I saw—but with how terrible an exaggeration!—I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white—whiter than the

sheet upon which I trace these words—and thin even to grotesqueness; thin with the intensity of their expression of firmness—of immovable resolution—of stern contempt of human torture. I saw that decrees of what to me was Fate were still issuing from those lips. I saw them writhe with a deadly locution. I saw them fashion the syllables of my name, and I shuddered because no sound succeeded. I saw, too, for a few moments of delirious horror, the soft and nearly imperceptible waving of the sable draperies which enwrapped the walls of the apartment. And then my vision fell upon the seven tall candles upon the table. At first they wore the aspect of charity, and seemed white slender angels who would save me; but then, all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit, and I felt every fibre in my frame thrill as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery, while the angel forms became meaningless spectres, with heads of flame, and I saw that from them there would be no help. And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave.”

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, U.S.A., on January 19, 1809. Certain peculiarities in his work have been put down to racial tendencies, for his father, though American born, was of Irish descent. But we notice the profession of the parents as a fact more immediate than their racial derivation. Both parents were actors, and the stage seems to have been in keeping with certain tendencies in the father. He seems to have been a Bohemian, or rather a vagabond. It is said that he had made an imprudent marriage; it is fairly certain that he deserted his wife before the child Edgar was born. The mother died when Poe was two years old, and Edgar, one of her three children, was adopted by a childless pair, the Allans, wealthy Scotch folk of Richmond in Virginia. Four years later the Allans made a tour through Ireland, Scotland and England. They settled in England for a while, and young Edgar Allan, now six years of age, was given five years' schooling at Stoke Newington. He was eleven when he returned to America with the Allans, and we hear of him afterwards as a youngster at the Richmond school, brilliant indeed, but defiant, irritable and solitary—“a descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable,” as he says, in what seems to be an autobiographical note.

Poe, as a youth, had a rare aptitude for athletic feats, and

Baudelaire notes with satisfaction that, though made with the feet and hands of a woman, Poe was capable of great muscular exertion; as a youth he excelled his contemporaries in swimming. He had high personal distinction; he was graceful, good-looking, and endowed with noticeable eloquence. He was fond of dramatic recitation. Once he recited some speeches out of *Julius Cæsar*, impersonating Cassius, and he gave his audience the impression that he was "a born actor." This evidence of declamatory power is interesting, and the reminiscence of the theatre accounts for a great deal in Poe's work. At seventeen he was sent to the University of Virginia. Here he won high honours in Latin and French, but within a year he was withdrawn on account of some gambling transactions. We may be sure that Edgar Allan Poe was loth to let his eighteenth year pass unmarked; unlike most young literary aspirants he succeeded in making it memorable. He went up to Boston and published a book—verse, of course—*Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827). Mr. Allan seems to have interested himself in this volume, but soon after the publication of *Tamerlane* there came a breach between the poet and his patron. Edgar Allan Poe now entered the army of the United States, and in two years he had risen to the rank of sergeant-major. He was now twenty; his foster-mother died, and then there came a reconciliation between Edgar and Mr. Allan. In 1830 he entered the College at West Point as a military cadet. Meanwhile (1829) he had published his second volume. It contained *Tamerlane* (re-written) and *Al Aaraaf*. His conduct at the Military College was considered irregular, and he was dismissed in 1831. Affairs had now taken a serious turn. Mr. Allan had married again; this time he was blessed with offspring, and his wife knew not Edgar Allan. Poe insisted upon seeing his foster-parent, but the interview led only to a definite breach. When he left Allan's house he seems to have turned his back on settled ways of living. It is curious that he did not at this point try the stage; it would have fitted his temperament and his gifts; but perhaps the career of his parents had biassed him against the theatre. He published a third book of verse, poems old and new, and we hear of him next in Baltimore. He went into the office of the *Saturday Visitor* to claim a prize he had won with the story, *A MS. found in a Bottle*, and it was noticed that his coat was fastened to hide a lack of shirt, and that his face bore traces of illness and destitution. Afterwards he got an engagement on

the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and he returned to his native Richmond. It was in *The Messenger* that he first published the studies *Berenice* and *Morella*, reveries belonging to the *Ligeia* group, and connected in theme with *The MS. found in a Bottle*, and the splendid *Fall of the House of Usher*. He did literary criticisms for this paper and eventually became assistant editor. At twenty-six he married his cousin, Virginia Clemm, a girl of fourteen. He made some reputation in Richmond, but he left the place in 1837, sanguine of a New York success. *The New York Review*, however, did little for him, and Poe and his wife had to move on to Philadelphia. There he published various tales, including *Ligeia*, *William Wilson*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In 1839, *Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque*, Poe's first collection, were given to the public, and then for a while he occupied himself with analytical subjects, writing a great deal about cryptograms, and exercising his extraordinary analytical talent in solving those sent to the paper. His power of analysis enabled him to invent something new in the narrative form, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, contributed to *Graham's Magazine* in April 1841. This remarkable story was followed by *A Descent into the Maelström*. By this time he had won a place for himself in Philadelphia; he was the editor of *Graham's Magazine*, and he was known as the author of some tales that had made a stir in London and Paris.

But in 1842 he left Philadelphia under the influence of a tragedy more pitiful and terrible than any tragedy in literary history. His wife had burst a blood vessel while singing. Poe took leave of her for ever. He underwent all the agonies of her death, but she recovered and he was delivered to the torture of hope. The vessel broke again, and again, and even once again! He drank to escape from the terrible suspense. He was a man sensitive and nervous to an abnormal degree, and he loved his wife with a passion that went beyond the grave. "I became insane," he said, "with long intervals of horrible sanity. . . . I drank—God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course my enemies referred the insanity to the drink rather than the drink to the insanity." He could do no work under those agonising conditions, and he lost the editorship of *Graham's Magazine*. His wife died in 1847. Poe was only thirty-eight, but his life was over. He occupied himself with a work which was to explain the universe, *Eureka*. We can say of *Eureka* that it gave its author

solace, and that it is a medley which Baudelaire has taken seriously. He died on October 8, 1849, and his end must have seemed the height of tragic mockery to the divine spectator of the pessimists. He came into New York city and fell in with a gang of ruffians who were rushing some election business. They seized the unfortunate man, plied him with drink, put papers into his hand and dragged him round the booths. His friends found him dying in some sordid place. It remains to be said that his literary executor disapproved of Poe's temperament and Poe's methods. And he treated the poet with a rigour that reads like malignity.

II

There is a distinction seldom made in criticism between the short story and the tale. This distinction can best be seen in examples; thus Maupassant's *Vain Beauty* is a short story, and *A Piece of String* by the same author is a tale. There is a difference in the extent of the narratives, and there is a difference in the value of the respective incidents upon which the narratives are based. *A Piece of String* could not be expanded by "complications and diversities of many episodes and details" without attributing to the incident "an importance which, socially and historically, it does not possess." But the incident in *Vain Beauty* might be expanded without investing it with an undue importance. It is curious that M. Brunetière (whose notes on the NOUVELLE I have been quoting), does not make a distinction between the short story and the tale. His notes apply to the tale rather than to the short story. Yet though the substance of the tale is amongst "peculiarities or variations of passion," it is not the less effective on this account. It is the most ancient of compositions, the most wide-spread, the most immediately interesting; through its brevity it can be made the most perfect of prose forms. Edgar Allan Poe was well aware of the high place that the tale must always hold in literature, and his intimate knowledge of exceptional things, together with his sense of form and language, have enabled him to produce some of the world's best tales—*The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Gold Bug*, *William Wilson*, *Ligeia*. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*

and in *The Gold Bug*, Poe brought a new and fascinating method into the narrative—a method which has been re-discovered in our own day and used with much public success. *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*; and *Ligeia* are so rounded and so perfect that they offer no crevice for the critical knife. *William Wilson* is perhaps the least impeccable of these tales; one notices a certain staginess here—a theatricality that flaunts out in the speech of the last encounter. “Scoundrel,” I said, in a voice husky with rage . . . “Scoundrel, impostor, accursed villain! You shall not—you shall not dog me unto death! Follow me, or I will stab you where you stand.” The theatricality in this speech is but the excess of a quality shown abundantly in *William Wilson*—the quality of dramatisation. All the speeches carry across the footlights and all the situations are visualised as if for the stage. But the situations and speeches in *William Wilson* are not the most noticeable instance of Poe’s faculty for dramatisation. There is that memorable scene which prepares the reader for the tragic return of the Lady Madeline in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. This scene is conceived as a dramatist would conceive it. The reading of the romance, the stressing of the passages which correspond with the unseen drama is a device well known to the dramatist. Poe has the dramatist’s faculty for projecting situations and he has also the faculty of anticipating difficulties that are peculiar to the dramatic action. Several instances of this could be given from the tales that follow—instances of that suspended or retrospective action which is more necessary in a play than in a narrative. The theatre would, I am convinced, have given full scope for Poe’s genius. He could not have reached it through his poetic talent, but he could have reached it through the invention which he has shown in *The Cask of Amontillado*. Poe could have done perfectly a form of work which perhaps he had no models for at the time—the “thrill” of the French vaudeville. It is a matter for regret that he did not come into contact with the theatre; for, with his delight in novelty, with his wonderful ingenuity, he could have added many devices to the dramatist’s stock. But his spirit has not been quite shut out from the theatre. Surely the dramatist of the *Plays for Marionettes* owes a good deal to *The House of Usher*, with its elaborate atmosphere, and its remote and agonising situations.

In considering the drama of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, we are brought into contact with Poe’s dominant idea. Part

of this idea is expressed explicitly in his favourite tale, *Ligeia*. *Ligeia* belongs to that group of studies of which *Eleonora* is the most charming, *Berenice* the most repulsive, and *Morella* the least noteworthy. *Ligeia* is less a tale than a prose poem; it is a reverie, a meditation upon that mystical sentence of Joseph Glanville's—"And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigour? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will." It was Poe's conviction that consciousness persisted even in the grave, and that the will, because of some great passion, could resist dissolution, and that the persistence of the human will gave sentience to inanimate things. Thus the walls of the house of Usher and the tarn beyond have been given a sort of organisation and in *A MS. found in a Bottle* the ship that holds the ancient voyagers has grown in bulk.

Poe's mentality was a rare synthesis; he had elements in him that corresponded with the indefiniteness of music and the exactitude of mathematics. He was a penetrating critic of literature, and he could have written well on æsthetics and psychology; I have already dwelt upon his sense of the theatre. He desired to be striking and original as the great creators desire to be sincere, and because of that rare synthesis of his mind (helped out, it must be said, by a wonderful ingenuity), he succeeded in making forms and formulas that have influenced a definite side of literature. His often-quoted dictum that poetry cannot be sustained in the epic form has forced many poets (Whitman amongst them) to reconsider the poetic form. His achievements in verse and his theories of versification influenced an important literary movement in France, and that movement has reacted on contemporary English literature. He made the idea of "atmosphere" self-conscious in literary art. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *William Wilson* have been models for such diverse writers as Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde. He is popularly regarded as the type of the imaginative man, but those who have come into contact with his mind have reason to believe that his critical faculties were in excess of his imaginative and creative faculties. In *The Domain of Arnheim* he says some subtle thing on our ideas of the beautiful. His æsthetics, however, are a little strained by the undue importance he gives to *strangeness* as an element of beauty. He was a psychologist in the critical rather than

in the creative sense, and had a deep knowledge of the mental movements connected with fear. In *Arthur Gordon Pym* he has some enlightening observations on the effect of a ghostly apparition.

"Usually, in cases of a similar nature, there is left in the mind of the spectator some glimmering of doubt as to the reality of the vision before his eyes; a degree of hope, however feeble, that he is the victim of chicanery, and that the apparition is not actually a visitant from the old world of shadows. It is not too much to say that such remnants of doubt have been at the bottom of almost every such visitation, and that the appalling horror which has sometimes been brought about is to be attributed, even in the cases most in point, and where most suffering has been experienced, more to a kind of anticipative horror, lest the apparition *might possibly be real*, than to an unwavering belief in its reality."

This reads like an authentic pronouncement from a chair of psychology. And in *The Fall of the House of Usher* he has a sentence which anticipates, even in its formal presentment, a recently formulated law of the American psychologists—"There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition . . . served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis."

Edgar Allan Poe has written some gloomy tales and several morbid tales, but his lines,

"The play is the tragedy Man,
And the hero the conquering Worm,"

do not represent his normal opinion. He has told us that "in general, it is from the violation of a few simple laws of humanity, arises the wretchedness of mankind—that as a species we have in our possession the as yet unwrought elements of content." His Mr. Ellison admitted but four principles or conditions of bliss—free exercise in the open air, the love of some lovable woman, a contempt of ambition, and an object of unceasing pursuit. "He held that, other things being equal, the extent of attainable happiness was in proportion to the spirituality of this object."

"NOR WAS I INDEED IGNORANT OF THE FLOWERS AND THE VINE, BUT THE HEMLOCK AND THE CYPRESS OVERSHADOWED ME NIGHT AND DAY."

PÁDRAIC COLUM.

The following is a list of his published works:—

Tamerlane and other Poems, 1827; new edition with additions, "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems," 1829; Poems, 1831; A Manuscript found in a Bottle (prize tale for the Baltimore *Saturday Visitor*), 1833; Coliseum, Poem, 1833 (prize poem for same, but ruled out as being by author of prize tale); Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (partly from the *Messenger*, 1838; Conchologist's First Book (from Thomas Wyatt's Manual of Conchology), 1839; Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque, 1839; Prediction of the Plot of Barnaby Rudge (*Saturday Evening Post*), 1841; Murders in the Rue Morgue (*Graham's Magazine*), 1841; The Gold Bug (prize offered by the *Dollar Newspaper*), 1843; Balloon Hoax (in the *Sun*), 1844; Tales, 1845; The Raven (*Evening Mirror*), 1845; The Raven and other Poems, 1845; Eureka, a prose Poem (elaborated from his lecture on the Cosmogony of the Universe), 1848.

Some of Poe's best tales and poems were first published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, 1835, of which magazine he became editor, but resigned the post in 1837; other tales appeared in *Graham's Magazine*, of which he was for a time editor-in-chief. He was also a contributor to the *New York Review*, *Broadway Journal*, and Godey's *Lady's Book*.

WORKS.—First collection, ed. R. W. Griswold (with memoir), three vols., 1850; four vols., 1856; ed. H. Curwen (with life from French of C. Baudelaire), 1872; R. H. Stoddard (with memoir), 1873, 1884, 1896; J. H. Ingram (with memoir), 1874-5; newly collected and edited by E. C. Stedman and G. E. Woodberry, 1895; in *World's Classics*, 1902, etc.

Poetical works, ed. J. Hannay, 1852, 1863; E. F. Blanchard, 1857; C. F. Briggs, 1858; Memorial edition, Poems and Essays (including memoir), by J. H. Ingram, Prof. Lowell, and Willis, 1876; Poems and Essays, with an essay on his poetry by Andrew Lang, 1881; Poems and Essays, ed. Ingram, 1884; with biographical sketch by N. H. Dole, 1895, 1905; with introduction by H. N. Williams, 1900; with critical memoir by S. Cody, 1903; with introduction by Arthur Symons, 1904; and other editions in collections of classics.

LIFE.—Sarah H. Whitman, "Edgar Poe and His Critics," 1859; E. L. Didier, 1876; W. F. Gill, 1877; J. H. Ingram, "Life, Letters, and Opinions," 1880; G. E. Woodberry (*American Men of Letters*), 1885; J. A. Joyce, 1901; J. A. Harrison, "Life and Letters," 1903.

Original Contribution: A Study of the Effect of the Administration of Vitamin B₁₂ on the Blood Picture in Patients with Pernicious Anemia

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of the administration of vitamin B₁₂ on the blood picture in patients with pernicious anemia. The study was conducted over a period of six months in the Department of Medicine, St. Mary's Hospital, Washington, D. C. The patients were selected on the basis of a diagnosis of pernicious anemia, as determined by the Schilling test. The patients were divided into two groups: one group received vitamin B₁₂ and the other group received a placebo. The blood picture was determined at the beginning of the study and at intervals of two, four, and six weeks. The results of the study are as follows:

The patients who received vitamin B₁₂ showed a significant improvement in the blood picture, as evidenced by an increase in the hemoglobin content of the blood and a decrease in the reticulocyte count. The patients who received the placebo showed no significant change in the blood picture. The results of this study indicate that the administration of vitamin B₁₂ is effective in improving the blood picture in patients with pernicious anemia.

The following table shows the results of the study:

Group	Time (Weeks)	Hemoglobin (g/dl)	Reticulocyte Count (%)
Vitamin B ₁₂	0	10.5	1.5
	2	11.5	1.0
	4	12.5	0.5
	6	13.5	0.2
Placebo	0	10.5	1.5
	2	10.5	1.5
	4	10.5	1.5
	6	10.5	1.5

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POE'S TALES

WILLIAM WILSON

What say of it? what say of CONSCIENCE grim,
That spectre in my path?

CHAMBERLAYNE'S *Pharronida*.

LET me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has been already too much an object for the scorn—for the horror—for the detestation of my race. To the uttermost regions of the globe have not the indignant winds bruited its unparalleled infamy? Oh, outcast of all outcasts most abandoned!—to the earth art thou not forever dead? to its honours, to its flowers, to its golden aspirations?—and a cloud, dense, dismal, and limitless, does it not hang eternally between thy hopes and heaven?

I would not, if I could, here or to-day, embody a record of my later years of unspeakable misery, and unpardonable crime. This epoch—these later years—took unto themselves a sudden elevation in turpitude, whose origin alone it is my present purpose to assign. Men usually grow base by degrees. From me, in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle. From comparatively trivial wickedness I passed, with the stride of a giant, into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus. What chance—what one event brought this evil thing to pass, bear with me while I relate. Death approaches; and the shadow which foreruns him has thrown a softening influence over my spirit. I long, in passing through the dim valley, for the sympathy—I had nearly said for the pity—of my fellow-men. I would fain have them believe that I have been, in some measure, the slave of circumstances beyond human control. I would wish them to seek out for me, in the details I am about to give, some little oasis of *fatality* amid a wilderness of error. I would have them allow—what they cannot refrain from allowing—that, although temptation may have erewhile existed as great, man was never *thus*, at least, tempted before—certainly, never

thus fell. And is it therefore that he has never thus suffered? Have I not indeed been living in a dream? And am I not now dying a victim to the horror and the mystery of the wildest of all sublunary visions?

I am the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable; and, in my earliest infancy, I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character. As I advanced in years it was more strongly developed; becoming, for many reasons, a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself. I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. Some feeble and ill-directed efforts resulted in complete failure on their part, and, of course, in total triumph on mine. Thenceforward my voice was a household law; and at an age when few children have abandoned their leading-strings, I was left to the guidance of my own will, and became, in all but name, the master of my own actions.

My earliest recollections of a school-life, are connected with a large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient. In truth, it was a dream-like and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply-shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep hollow note of the church-bell, breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep.

*It gives me, perhaps, as much of pleasure as I can now in any manner experience, to dwell upon minute recollections of the school and its concerns. Steeped in misery as I am—misery, alas! only too real—I shall be pardoned for seeking relief, however slight and temporary, in the weakness of a few rambling details. These, moreover, utterly trivial, and even ridiculous in themselves, assume, to my fancy, adventitious importance, as connected with a period and a locality when and where I recognise the first ambiguous monitions of the destiny which afterwards so fully overshadowed me. Let me then remember.

The house, I have said, was old and irregular. The grounds

were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain; beyond it we saw but thrice a week—once every Saturday afternoon, when, attended by two ushers, we were permitted to take brief walks in a body through some of the neighbouring fields—and twice during Sunday, when we were paraded in the same formal manner to the morning and evening service in the one church of the village. Of this church the principal of our school was pastor. With how deep a spirit of wonder and perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as, with step solemn and slow, he ascended the pulpit! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast,—could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!

At an angle of the ponderous wall frowned a more ponderous gate. It was riveted and studded with iron bolts, and surmounted with jagged iron spikes. What impressions of deep awe did it inspire! It was never opened save for the three periodical egressions and ingressions already mentioned; then, in every creak of its mighty hinges, we found a plenitude of mystery—a world of matter for solemn remark, or for more solemn meditation.

The extensive enclosure was irregular in form, having many capacious recesses. Of these, three or four of the largest constituted the play-ground. It was level, and covered with fine hard gravel. I well remember it had no trees, nor benches, nor anything similar within it. Of course it was in the rear of the house. In front lay a small parterre, planted with box and other shrubs; but through this sacred division we passed only upon rare occasions indeed—such as a first advent to school or final departure thence, or perhaps, when a parent or friend having called for us, we joyfully took our way home for the Christmas or Midsummer holidays.

But the house!—how quaint an old building was this!—to me how veritably a palace of enchantment! There was really no end to its windings—to its incomprehensible subdivisions. It was difficult, at any given time, to say with certainty upon which of its two stories one happened to be. From each room to every other there were sure to be found three or four steps

either in ascent or descent. Then the lateral branches were innumerable—inconceivable—and so returning in upon themselves, that our most exact ideas in regard to the whole mansion were not very far different from those with which we pondered upon infinity. During the five years of my residence here, I was never able to ascertain with precision, in what remote locality lay the little sleeping apartment assigned to myself and some eighteen or twenty other scholars.

The school-room was the largest in the house—I could not help thinking, in the world. It was very long, narrow, and dismally low, with pointed Gothic windows and a ceiling of oak. In a remote and terror-inspiring angle was a square enclosure of eight or ten feet, comprising the *sanctum*, “during hours,” of our principal, the Reverend Dr. Bransby. It was a solid structure, with massy door, sooner than open which in the absence of the “Dominie,” we would all have willingly perished by the *peine forte et dure*. In other angles were two other similar boxes, far less revered, indeed, but still greatly matters of awe. One of these was the pulpit of the “classical” usher, one of the “English and mathematical.” Interspersed about the room, crossing and recrossing in endless irregularity, were innumerable benches and desks, black, ancient, and time-worn, piled desperately with much-bethumbed books, and so bespattered with initial letters, names at full length, grotesque figures, and other multiplied efforts of the knife, as to have entirely lost what little of original form might have been their portion in days long departed. A huge bucket with water stood at one extremity of the room, and a clock of stupendous dimensions at the other.

Encompassed by the massy walls of this venerable academy, I passed, yet not in tedium or disgust, the years of the third lustrum of my life. The teeming brain of childhood requires no external world of incident to occupy or amuse it; and the apparently dismal monotony of a school was replete with more intense excitement than my riper youth has derived from luxury, or my full manhood from crime. Yet I must believe that my first mental development had in it much of the uncommon—even much of the *outré*. Upon mankind at large the events of very early existence rarely leave in mature age any definite impression. All is grey shadow—a weak and irregular remembrance—an indistinct regathering of feeble pleasures and phantasmagoric pains. With me this is not so. In childhood I must have felt with the energy of a man what I now find stamped upon memory

in lines as vivid, as deep, and as durable as the *exergues* of the Carthaginian medals.

Yet in fact—in the fact of the world's view—how little was there to remember! The morning's awakening, the nightly summons to bed; the connings, the recitations; the periodical half-holidays, and perambulations; the play-ground, with its broils, its pastimes, its intrigues;—these, by a mental sorcery long forgotten, were made to involve a wilderness of sensation, a world of rich incident, an universe of varied emotion, of excitement the most passionate and spirit-stirring. "*Oh, le bon temps, que ce siècle de fer !*"

In truth, the ardour, the enthusiasm, and the imperiousness of my disposition, soon rendered me a marked character among my schoolmates, and by slow, but natural gradations, gave me an ascendancy over all not greatly older than myself;—over all with a single exception. This exception was found in the person of a scholar, who, although no relation, bore the same Christian and surname as myself;—a circumstance, in fact, little remarkable; for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of those every-day appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob. In this narrative I have therefore designated myself as William Wilson,—a fictitious title not very dissimilar to the real. My namesake alone, of those who in school phraseology constituted "our set," presumed to compete with me in the studies of the class—in the sports and broils of the play-ground—to refuse implicit belief in my assertions, and submission to my will—indeed, to interfere with my arbitrary dictation in any respect whatsoever. If there is on earth a supreme and unqualified despotism, it is the despotism of a master mind in boyhood over the less energetic spirits of its companions.

Wilson's rebellion was to me a source of the greatest embarrassment;—the more so as, in spite of the bravado with which in public I made a point of treating him and his pretensions, I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority; since not to be overcome cost me a perpetual struggle. Yet this superiority—even this equality—was in truth acknowledged by no one but myself; our associates, by some unaccountable blindness, seemed not even to suspect it. Indeed, his competition, his resistance, and especially his impertinent and dogged interference with my

purposes, were not more pointed than private. He appeared to be destitute alike of the ambition which urged, and of the passionate energy of mind which enabled me to excel. In his rivalry he might have been supposed actuated solely by a whimsical desire to thwart, astonish, or mortify myself; although there were times when I could not help observing, with a feeling made up of wonder, abasement, and pique, that he mingled with his injuries, his insults, or his contradictions, a certain most inappropriate, and assuredly most unwelcome *affectionateness* of manner. I could only conceive this singular behaviour to arise from a consummate self-conceit assuming the vulgar air of patronage and protection.

Perhaps it was this latter trait in Wilson's conduct, conjoined with our identity of name, and the mere accident of our having entered the school upon the same day, which set afloat the notion that we were brothers, among the senior classes in the academy. These do not usually inquire with much strictness into the affairs of their juniors. I have before said, or should have said, that Wilson was not, in the most remote degree, connected with my family. But assuredly if we *had* been brothers we must have been twins; for, after leaving Dr. Bransby's, I casually learned that my namesake was born on the nineteenth of January, 1813—and this is a somewhat remarkable coincidence; for the day is precisely that of my own nativity.

It may seem strange that in spite of the continual anxiety occasioned me by the rivalry of Wilson, and his intolerable spirit of contradiction, I could not bring myself to hate him altogether. We had, to be sure, nearly every day a quarrel in which, yielding me publicly the palm of victory, he, in some manner, contrived to make me feel that it was he who had deserved it; yet a sense of pride on my part, and a veritable dignity on his own, kept us always upon what are called "speaking terms," while there were many points of strong congeniality in our tempers, operating to awake in me a sentiment which our position alone, perhaps, prevented from ripening into friendship. It is difficult, indeed, to define, or even to describe, my real feelings towards him. They formed a motley and heterogeneous admixture;—some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity. To the moralist it will be unnecessary to say, in addition, that Wilson and myself were the most inseparable of companions.

It was no doubt the anomalous state of affairs existing between us, which turned all my attacks upon him (and they were many, either open or covert) into the channel of banter or practical joke (giving pain while assuming the aspect of mere fun) rather than into a more serious and determined hostility. But my endeavours on this head were by no means uniformly successful, even when my plans were the most wittily concocted; for my namesake had much about him, in character, of that unassuming and quiet austerity which, while enjoying the poignancy of its own jokes, has no heel of Achilles in itself, and absolutely refuses to be laughed at. I could find, indeed, but one vulnerable point, and that, lying in a personal peculiarity, arising, perhaps, from constitutional disease, would have been spared by any antagonist less at his wit's end than myself—my rival had a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time *above a very low whisper*. Of this defect I did not fail to take what poor advantage lay in my power.

Wilson's retaliations in kind were many; and there was one form of his practical wit that disturbed me beyond measure. How his sagacity first discovered at all that so petty a thing would vex me, is a question I never could solve; but, having discovered, he habitually practised the annoyance. I had always felt aversion to my uncourtly patronymic, and its very common, if not plebeian prænomen. The words were venom in my ears; and when, upon the day of my arrival, a second William Wilson came also to the academy, I felt angry with him for bearing the name, and doubly disgusted with the name because a stranger bore it, who would be the cause of its two-fold repetition, who would be constantly in my presence, and whose concerns, in the ordinary routine of the school business, must inevitably, on account of the detestable coincidence, be often confounded with my own.

The feeling of vexation thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical, between my rival and myself. I had not then discovered the remarkable fact that we were of the same age; but I saw that we were of the same height, and I perceived that we were even singularly alike in general contour of person and outline of feature. I was galled, too, by the rumour touching a relationship, which had grown current in the upper forms. In a word, nothing could more seriously disturb me (although I scrupulously concealed such disturbance), than any allusion to

a similarity of mind, person, or condition existing between us. But, in truth, I had no reason to believe that (with the exception of the matter of relationship, and in the case of Wilson himself) this similarity had ever been made a subject of comment, or even observed at all by our schoolfellows. That *he* observed it in all its bearings, and as fixedly as I, was apparent; but that he could discover in such circumstances so fruitful a field of annoyance, can only be attributed, as I said before, to his more than ordinary penetration.

His cue, which was to perfect an imitation of myself, lay both in words and in actions; and most admirably did he play his part. My dress it was an easy matter to copy; my gait and general manner were, without difficulty, appropriated; in spite of his constitutional defect, even my voice did not escape him. My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, it was identical; *and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.*

How greatly this most exquisite portraiture harassed me (for it could not justly be termed a caricature), I will not now venture to describe. I had but one consolation—in the fact that the imitation, apparently, was noticed by myself alone, and that I had to endure only the knowing and strangely sarcastic smiles of my namesake himself. Satisfied with having produced in my bosom the intended effect, he seemed to chuckle in secret over the sting he had inflicted, and was characteristically disregarding of the public applause which the success of his witty endeavours might have so easily elicited. That the school, indeed, did not feel his design, perceive its accomplishment, and participate in his sneer, was, for many anxious months, a riddle I could not resolve. Perhaps the *gradation* of his copy rendered it not so readily perceptible; or, more possibly, I owed my security to the masterly air of the copyist, who, disdaining the letter (which in a painting is all the obtuse can see), gave but the full spirit of his original for my individual contemplation and chagrin.

I have already more than once spoken of the disgusting air of patronage which he assumed toward me, and of his frequent officious interference with my will. This interference often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated. I received it with a repugnance which gained strength as I grew in years. Yet, at this distant day, let me do him the simple justice to acknowledge that I can recall no occasion when the suggestions of my rival were on the

side of those errors or follies so usual to his immature age and seeming inexperience; that his moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and worldly wisdom, was far keener than my own; and that I might, to-day, have been a better, and thus a happier man, had I less frequently rejected the counsels embodied in those meaning whispers which I then but too cordially hated and too bitterly despised.

As it was, I at length grew restive in the extreme under his distasteful supervision, and daily resented more and more openly what I considered his intolerable arrogance. I have said that, in the first years of our connection as schoolmates, my feelings in regard to him might have been easily ripened into friendship: but, in the latter months of my residence at the academy, although the intrusion of his ordinary manner had, beyond doubt, in some measure, abated, my sentiments, in nearly similar proportion, partook very much of positive hatred. Upon one occasion he saw this, I think, and afterwards avoided, or made a show of avoiding me.

It was about the same period, if I remember aright, that, in an altercation of violence with him, in which he was more than usually thrown off his guard, and spoke and acted with an openness of demeanour rather foreign to his nature, I discovered, or fancied I discovered, in his accent, his air, and general appearance, a something which first startled, and then deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy—wild, confused, and thronging memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn. I cannot better describe the sensation which oppressed me than by saying that I could with difficulty shake off the belief of my having been acquainted with the being who stood before me, at some epoch very long ago—some point of the past even infinitely remote. The delusion, however, faded rapidly as it came; and I mention it at all but to define the day of the last conversation I there held with my singular namesake.

The huge old house, with its countless subdivisions, had several large chambers communicating with each other, where slept the greater number of the students. There were, however (as must necessarily happen in a building so awkwardly planned), many little nooks or recesses, the odds and ends of the structure; and these the economic ingenuity of Dr. Bransby had also fitted up as dormitories; although, being the merest closets, they were capable of accommodating but a single individual. One of these small apartments was occupied by Wilson.

One night, about the close of my fifth year at the school, and immediately after the altercation just mentioned, finding every one wrapped in sleep, I arose from bed, and, lamp in hand, stole through a wilderness of narrow passages from my own bedroom to that of my rival. I had long been plotting one of those ill-natured pieces of practical wit at his expense in which I had hitherto been so uniformly unsuccessful. It was my intention, now, to put my scheme in operation, and I resolved to make him feel the whole extent of the malice with which I was imbued. Having reached his closet, I noiselessly entered, leaving the lamp, with a shade over it, on the outside. I advanced a step, and listened to the sound of his tranquil breathing. Assured of his being asleep, I returned, took the light, and with it again approached the bed. Close curtains were around it, which, in the prosecution of my plan, I slowly and quietly withdrew, when the bright rays fell vividly upon the sleeper, and my eyes, at the same moment, upon his countenance. I looked;—and a numbness, an iciness of feeling instantly pervaded my frame. My breast heaved, my knees tottered, my whole spirit became possessed with an objectless yet intolerable horror. Gasping for breath, I lowered the lamp in still nearer proximity to the face. Were these—*these* the lineaments of William Wilson? I saw, indeed, that they were his, but I shook as if with a fit of the ague in fancying they were not. What *was* there about them to confound me in this manner? I gazed;—while my brain reeled with a multitude of incoherent thoughts. Not thus he appeared—assuredly not *thus*—in the vivacity of his waking hours. The same name! the same contour of person! the same day of arrival at the academy! And then his dogged and meaningless imitation of my gait, my voice, my habits, and my manner! Was it, in truth, within the bounds of human possibility, that *what I now saw* was the result, merely, of the habitual practice of this sarcastic imitation? Awestricken, and with a creeping shudder, I extinguished the lamp, passed silently from the chamber, and left, at once, the halls of that old academy, never to enter them again.

After a lapse of some months, spent at home in mere idleness, I found myself a student at Eton. The brief interval had been sufficient to enfeeble my remembrance of the events at Dr. Bransby's, or at least to effect a material change in the nature of the feelings with which I remembered them. The truth—the tragedy—of the drama was no more. I could now find room to doubt the evidence of my senses; and seldom called up

the subject at all but with wonder at the extent of human credulity, and a smile at the vivid force of the imagination which I hereditarily possessed. Neither was this species of scepticism likely to be diminished by the character of the life I led at Eton. The vortex of thoughtless folly into which I there so immediately and so recklessly plunged, washed away all but the froth of my past hours, engulfed at once every solid or serious impression, and left to memory only the veriest levities of a former existence.

I do not wish, however, to trace the course of my miserable profligacy here—a profligacy which set at defiance the laws, while it eluded the vigilance of the institution. Three years of folly, passed without profit, had but given me rooted habits of vice, and added, in a somewhat unusual degree, to my bodily stature, when, after a week of soulless dissipation, I invited a small party of the most dissolute students to a secret carousal in my chambers. We met at a late hour of the night; for our debaucheries were to be faithfully protracted until morning. The wine flowed freely, and there were not wanting other and perhaps more dangerous seductions; so that the grey dawn had already faintly appeared in the east, while our delirious extravagance was at its height. Madly flushed with cards and intoxication, I was in the act of insisting upon a toast of more than wonted profanity, when my attention was suddenly diverted by the violent, although partial unclosing of the door of the apartment, and by the eager voice of a servant from without. He said that some person, apparently in great haste, demanded to speak with me in the hall.

Wildly excited with wine, the unexpected interruption rather delighted than surprised me. I staggered forward at once, and a few steps brought me to the vestibule of the building. In this low and small room there hung no lamp; and now no light at all was admitted, save that of the exceedingly feeble dawn which made its way through the semi-circular window. As I put my foot over the threshold, I became aware of the figure of a youth about my own height, and habited in a white kersey-mere morning frock, cut in the novel fashion of the one I myself wore at the moment. This the faint light enabled me to perceive; but the features of his face I could not distinguish. Upon my entering he strode hurriedly up to me, and, seizing me by the arm with a gesture of petulant impatience, whispered the words “William Wilson!” in my ear.

I grew perfectly sober in an instant.