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EDGAR ALLAN POE:
A GENTLEMAN'S EDUCATION

ANNE WHITEHOUSE

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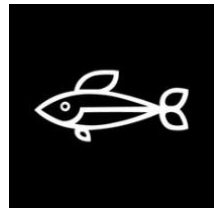

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WITH AN INTERVIEW OF THE MASTER

BY ASSOCIATE EDITOR PAMELYN CASTO

A GENTLEMAN'S EDUCATION

Since the sad experience of my school-boy days to this present writing, I have seen little to sustain the notion, held by some folks, that schoolboys are the happiest of all mortals. Says one of the wittiest writers of the day:--"What are the beatitudes of a scholastic paradise? To be fagged, flogged, thumped, coerced to mental labor, and constrained in personal liberty. This may be all very proper and salutary (so is physic) but it is not happiness; and there is very, very rarely, in the instance of a boy, while he is in one of these prisons of the body and treadmills of the mind, who is not always wishing to get out of it, and to get home."

-Edgar Allan Poe, "School-Days."[i]

America is adolescence without end…Boys will be boys…and spoiled boys will be spoiled boys…and the violence will recur periodically—like cicadas.

-Ben Lerner, *The Topeka School*

When the Allans brought the orphaned Edgar, not yet three years old, into their home, it was with the expectation that he would benefit from the advantages of their social position, and that chief among these advantages was "a gentleman's education." Edgar's paternal family in Baltimore, struggling financially and already saddled with the care of young Henry, was grateful to the Allans and to the Mackenzies for taking in toddler Edgar and baby Rosalie and considered the orphans fortunate.

Before we examine the education Edgar received before he entered the University of Virginia in January 1826, it is instructive to consider what it meant to have "a gentleman's education" during his childhood in America and England, and how the purpose of education had evolved from earlier times. In the middle ages, education in schools, colleges, and universities existed primarily to prepare men to take religious orders as monks and priests. The main objective of the English public schools, such as Eton and Winchester, was to train boys to sing in church choirs. A young man of the nobility preparing for knighthood did not go to school but was apprenticed as a squire to another noble family, where he was trained in the arts of war.

By the Renaissance, warfare as a gentleman's occupation was being replaced by new careers in public service, government, and law, all which required literate men. The private British boarding schools, known as public schools, formerly open to local boys,

were co-opted by the gentry and the aristocracy. Schools and universities increasingly became exclusive class preserves. Study of the Classics was mandatory. While a familiarity with Greek and Latin was useful to those who went on to study medicine or law, the Classics were not taught because of their utility but because their knowledge conferred social status.

The humanistic conception of the complete man, which developed in the Renaissance, sought to develop the gentleman to the full extent of his intellectual powers. The gentleman was to strive to be superior intellectually and to be proud of his superiority. The Classics were believed to represent this humanistic ideal at its finest.

At conflict with this ideal was a notion of balance and moderation that decreed that the gentleman not excel, that he remain an amateur and not a specialist: hence, the origin of the "gentleman's C." Yet a third notion conflicted with these first two: a gentleman's duty was to serve the realm, and the purpose of education was to inculcate this sense of duty. As David Castronovo noted in his groundbreaking study, *The English Gentleman*:

> Aristocrats in the sixteenth century had come to realize that their claims upon public office and administrative privileges were not absolute, and must be lived up to. If the gentleman of blood and rank did not live up to the needs of society, if he were not a competent administrator, perhaps the man of lower birth could take his place. This, in fact, was why the gentleman needed education: to keep his place in society, to prove that he could serve England better than those of inferior birth.[ii]

Rather than encouraging social mobility, this system of private education served as a barrier against it by restricting access to all but white males of the gentry and aristocracy. The ideals and examples of the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire, and the Greek polis would inspire and instruct future leaders. However, by the early nineteenth century, the limitations of this narrow scholastic focus were apparent. Scholars influenced by the Enlightenment expanded the curriculum to encompass new areas of knowledge—the sciences and mathematics, history, geography, and modern languages. This expanded ideal was embraced by reformers such as Thomas Jefferson when he founded the University of Virginia. The gentlemen formed by such an education would be wise and discerning in their exercise of power and responsibly assert their superiority to the benefit of their country.

However, in the bastions of educational privilege, the reality fell far short of this ideal. Rather than fostering reason and inquiry, the teaching methodology of the English public schools often consisted of rote learning and pedantry. Cribbing and laziness were rife. Instead of inculcating a sense of civic responsibility, the schools were places of violence, fear, and intimidation, where students learned cruelty and domination. A brutal flogging system prevailed, where schoolmasters routinely beat their students for minor infringements, or for no reason at all, and older boys punished younger ones, with some fights escalating into manslaughter.

> The day-to-day reality behind these ideals of learning tended to be a matter of floggings, bullying, survivalist tactics…The schools tolerated,

> indeed had a tradition of fostering, "liberties" like uncontrolled roughhouse, thieving, food riots, and sadistic games and tricks. Such things were accepted as being part of life—and the school was a microcosm of life's trials, disappointments, violent encounters. Those who endured the rigors and the brutality often praised the system and spoke of the honor and distinction of suffering.[iii]

To have survived such an education marked one as a member of an elite. The eminent Victorian scholar Leslie Stephen (the father of Virginia Woolf), observed, "To have been flogged in accordance with traditions laid down from our antiquity…was to receive an indelible hallmark, stamping the sufferer forever as genuine metal."[iv]

Under such a system, delicate, sensitive boys like Poe were bound to suffer more. In his study, *Boys Together: English Public Schools 1800-1864,* John Chandos quoted Lord Chatham, "A Public School might suit a boy of turbulent, forward disposition, but would not do where there was any gentleness."[v] The education of a "gentleman" discouraged and belittled expressions of "gentleness." Christian humility was not valued in these institutions. Classroom Greek and brawling outside of class were thought to nurture "the free spirit" of the gentleman, "at once aristocratic, untamed, un-Christian, and barbaric."[vi]

Thomas Hughes' novel, *Tom Brown's School Days,* published in 1857 and based on the experiences of the author and his brother at England's Rugby School in the 1830s, exposed the culture of vicious bullying, violent brawling, unfairness, and intolerance that thrived in the public schools that educated the sons of the upper classes and, increasingly, the wealthy commercial class. George Orwell in "Such, Such were the Joys," and Roald Dahl in *Boy* described the systemic physical and psychological cruelty of these schools. In *My Early Life,* Winston Churchill wrote, "Flogging with the birch in accordance with the Eton fashion was a great feature of the curriculum."[vii] The artist Roger Fry, another Etonian, wrote in his private diaries of "solemn rituals, which sometimes resulted in not just blood, but excrement splashed around the caning block," and described the sexual arousal experienced by him and by the headmaster, an ordained clergyman, who was caning him.[viii]

The Victorians were aware of the potential dangers of sending young children off into the care of strangers. The public schools worried them as much or more than the workhouses for the poor. In the nineteenth century, three parliamentary commissions were formed to investigate the astonishing number of deaths from suicides, assaults by teachers and pupils, starvation, and epidemics, as well as the riots and financial frauds, that plagued the educational system of the wealthy elite. While some of the most flagrant abuses have been mitigated by reforms, the system persists to this day, due to the prevailing belief that to be brutalized at a public school is "key to becoming the right sort of Briton—one that might run an empire or a corporation or a cricket team."[ix]

In his 2017 book, *Stiff Upper Lip: Secrets, Crimes, and the Schooling of a Ruling Class*, author Alex Renton concluded, "Savage discipline, along with sexual confusion and formalized bullying, are so common in the schooldays memoirs of the British elite in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that you have to conclude that parents wanted and

paid for their children to experience such things. To most of the class that used them, the private schools were factories that would reliably produce men and women who would run Britain, its politics, business, and culture. Boarding school was a proven good investment. So thousands of men and women who had suffered awfully, by their own admission, sent their children off for just the same."[x]

Similarly, men and women in the rising commercial classes aspired to this education for their children, that they had never had themselves, so that their children might achieve a higher station in life. Many of them had no idea of the culture of the schools to which they were exposing their children. To give their children this education often required of them great sacrifices, for which they expected their children to be grateful. In contrast, the children felt abandoned, torn from the protection of their families at an early age and thrust into an environment of bullying, intimidation, and emotional and physical cruelty. Knowledge of their parents' sacrifices and expectations combined with feelings of shame led many of the children to keep their misery a secret. There existed a great pressure not to report one's peers to the authorities. Because the abuse was so often hidden from public view, it persisted.

* * *

In the early nineteenth century, John Allan was one such aspiring merchant, rising from orphanhood through the employment and patronage of his wealthy uncle, John Galt. At the age of fifteen, he emigrated from Ayrshire, near Scotland's west coast, where he was born, to join Galt in Richmond, Virginia, as a clerk in his employ. Five years later, he had saved enough money to start his own business, contributing one thousand pounds to form a formal partnership with fellow clerk Charles Ellis. In 1803, he married Frances (Fanny) Keeling Valentine, from Princess Anne County, Virginia, whose father had recently died. After they married, Fanny's spinster sister, Ann (Nancy) Moore Valentine, made her home with them. The following year, Allan took the oath of American citizenship before Chief Justice John Marshall.

Although John Allan's formal education ended early, he had a high opinion of his own intelligence and fancied himself a literary man, with an appreciation of English and Scottish poetry. He was a diligent letter writer who often turned to his pen to express himself. Self-important and detail-oriented, he made duplicates of his letters, preserved his correspondence, and kept careful ledgers of his personal and business finances. The archive of Ellis-Allan papers now in the Library of Congress is comprised of hundreds of volumes of letters, ledgers, journals, and other materials. What we know of Edgar's early education is from Allan's record of expenses related to his foster son.

Allan would have been astounded to learn that the principal interest of his papers to contemporary scholars is his connection to Edgar Allan Poe. His hatred of Poe was more than ordinary disapproval that Poe had not grown into the person he would have wished, or disappointment that Poe had not ingratiated himself, the way he had ingratiated himself with William Galt.

In the conflict between them, Allan had the advantages, and still he brought the full force of his hatred to bear on Poe, as if they were equally matched. There was no way that Poe could emerge victorious from their conflict, and yet Allan behaved as if he

were mortally threatened. He avoided Poe and banished him from his home.

The roots of the antipathy between them remain obscure. Surely much of it was due to the Allans' unhappy marriage. Although they often presented a different picture to their friends and associates, John and Fanny Allan were incompatible physically and emotionally. Allan was an unfaithful husband, and Fanny escaped into illness. Allan couldn't forgive Edgar when he sided with his wife. But this is just part of the story. Much of the discord arose from and was expressed in conflicts over Edgar's education.

Particularly in the early years of his schooling, Allan took pride in Edgar's academic prowess and to an extent lived vicariously through Edgar's accomplishments, like other parents who give their children the education they would have wanted for themselves. But at some point in Edgar's adolescence, they became adversaries, all the more fierce because of the identification that had once existed between them.

* * *

Unlike William Galt, known up and down the James River as "Old Skinflint" by the gentlemen planters who depended on his deliveries of goods, John Allan had a jocular side to him and enjoyed his fun with the ladies. The Allans pursued an active social life, welcoming visiting family members and hosting entertainments. In February 1811, before Edgar entered the Allans' lives, Fanny's cousin Margaret Keeling Nimmo visited from Norfolk. A flirtation between John Allan and Margaret Nimmo ensued, which Allan attempted to prolong through correspondence. On Feb. 26, 1811, shortly after Margaret's departure from Richmond, he copied out a verse of Sir Walter Scott for her, adding the following commentary, which is worth quoting at length for what it reveals of Allan's personality and his pretensions:

> My text will not fail to make you smile, if not laugh for then you will fancy you see me strutting, with extended arm, relating the flight between Snowden's knight and my hero—stop! Stop! Let me see: I think I have read somewhere, that the beauty of letter writing consists generally in using exactly that kind of freedom which a person might be supposed to do to another in common conversation; at all events, I have a might desire to try what stuff my brain will jumble together in the experiment. Hitherto, you see, I have not said anything to much purpose, and yet I have already written full eleven lines. Gracious God! As Bowler Cocke [a prominent Richmond planter of their circle] says; and if it really be true in eleven lines, I have said nothing, how many more must I write before I come to my purpose? Now, curse me, if I can tell. I was going to tell you a long story; but I know you don't like long stories, and so I will e'en shorten it as possible. Pray, how do ye do? How did you get home? And where is my cloak? All these are important inquiries to "a man of my talents" as Swift says in a letter to—Oh the Devil, I forget, God forgive me? how fast I am consuming these most valuable items both to myself and others—Time, Candle, and Patience. I means yours,--not to say anything of the minor objects—Pen, Ink, and Paper. But just let me trespass a little farther; I shall run out presently, unless it should happen with this letter, as with most

> concerns in life, and that is, we generally say more about nothing, than when talking of Somebody, because in the latter case our ideas are fixed by a short of imaginary boundary line, but in the former it's like the immensity of space, the subject is really inexhaustible, as you will see most amply illustrated by the following example! Now only consider, how I began, what I began about, how I have continued, and fancy where I should end if I did not here make a full (stop)
> The Letter
>
> I really thought it probable we might have had a few lines from you on arriving safe at home, just to let us know that the Gulf of Hampton Roads spared you for creating so many aching ♥'s in Richmond…Poor Frances has really been quite ill, and though by no means well now, yet she has much recovered. Nancy sticks to the old thing…so that we consider ourselves nearly fit for a frolic…I dreamt there was a Lieutenant in your head, but I dreamt wrong…Write Fanny and tell her all the news of Norfolk. How goes the report about you there? They will have you engaged, I doubt not. I have no more news at this time; so God bless you and all the family.
>
> Your sincere Friend,
> John Allan[xi]

In this letter, Allan prattles, full of hot air and excuses that are not excuses, releasing a barrage of self-conscious literary flourishes that convey nothing but that he is wasting time, materials, and the patience of his subject. Yet there is an unspoken assumption that what he is writing is full of wit. While affecting to protest, he takes it for granted that Margaret will be charmed.

That this hard, harsh man, so mean-spirited and unrelenting in his judgments, whom Poe in later life called "brutal," was capable of such silliness is a revelation. Although Allan described himself in a letter to Ellis as "157 [pounds] of good, hard flesh,"[xii] this letter to his wife's young, attractive cousin, who in two years would be engaged to Charles Ellis, reveals a slimy underside to his character as he conducted a flirtation under his wife's gaze. Allan was accustomed to take what liberties he wished. He acted from a sense of entitlement, and he expected those who shared his life to flatter him.

Fearful, delicate, and nervous in temperament, Fanny Allan was not such a wife. She clung to her frailties and escaped from her overbearing husband into ill health. Her complaints and illnesses are constant themes of her husband's correspondence. Unlike her husband, Fanny was unaccustomed to expressing herself in writing. Like most women of her time, her education was rudimentary, and her spelling and grammar uncertain. In the Valentine collection are two letters from her to her husband, in which she insisted on her infirmities. The topic of her health was their battleground.

Fanny longed for a child of her own, but her frailness was an obstacle, even though the physical care of children for women of her wealth, race, and social class was performed

by slaves, euphemistically called "servants." Edgar's references to Fanny suggest a mutual love, but Fanny was also a dependent, whose most powerful weapons against her husband were resistance and refusal.

Presumably Allan made the decisions about Edgar's education, since he was responsible for his tuition. The earliest documentation of Edgar's formal schooling is a receipt for $4.00, dated Jan. 20, 1814, for "1 quarters Tuition of Edgar A. Poe" signed by Clotilda Fisher, probably the mistress of a "dame's school," an equivalent of today's pre-school.[xiii] Poe's biographer Thomas Ollive Mabbott reported the suggestive story, told by two of Edgar's contemporaries after his death, that the schoolmistress punished Edgar for taking a carrot from her garden by hanging it around his neck. He was sent home wearing this necklace, so incensing John Allan that he went to the teacher and rebuked her.[xiv] If there is any truth to this story, Allan took Edgar's humiliation as a reflection upon himself. In later years, Edgar would endure far greater punishments and deprivations without winning Allan's sympathy.

Following his time with Mistress Fisher, Edgar studied at William Ewing's school. Several years after Edgar's attendance, Ewing advertised the curriculum in the *Richmond Compiler*: "The Greek, Latin, French and English languages together with Writing, Arithmetic, and Mathematics, will be taught on the most approved principles."[xv] Allan was also paying Ewing tuition for a boy named Edwin Collier, who was probably a few years older than Edgar, as Allan's papers include earlier tuition bills for Collier from two other schools. Presumably Collier was Allan's illegitimate son, whom he felt obligated to educate. But Allan's sense of obligation was limited.

Seeking the expansion of business opportunities after the conclusion of the War of 1812, Allan sailed for Great Britain in 1815 to open a London branch of Allan & Ellis (an inversion of the Richmond firm's name). Accompanying him were Fanny, her sister Nancy Valentine, and six-year-old Edgar. Through Ellis, Allan made a tuition payment to Ewing for Edwin Collier in October. Thenceforth, his payments ceased, though the boy continued to attend Ewing's school. Among Allan's papers is this carefully worded letter from Ewing dated November 27, 1817:

> …relative to Master Edwin Collier, whom you placed under my tuition in the spring of the year 1815 and who has regularly attended my school since that period. His mother informs me that she has frequently reminded your partner Mr. Ellis to mention Edwin's situation to you, but thinks that amid the hurry of important communications he had omitted the subject altogether. She has accordingly solicited me to write to you, and to present you a statement of Edwin's account from his first entrance to the end of the year. It is as follows:

Mr. Allan	To Wm Ewing, Dr.	
For Master Edwin Collier's tuition from March 15th		
1815 to March 14 1818 at $42 per annum		$126.00
Cr. June 1815 by cash from Mr. Allan	$12.25	
Oct. 1816 by cash from Mr. Ellis	$29.75	42.00
To Balance		84.00

> Thus there will be a balance due of $84 on the 14th of March next — You will confer a favor on me, and equally so on Mrs. Collier, by dropping a few lines to me through the medium of your firm, first opportunity, expressive of your concern for the tuition and education of the above child, as far as you may deem proper in regard to the future.[xvi]

Ewing asked after Edgar, the first of his mentors to take an affectionate interest in him: "I trust Edgar continues to be well and to like his School as much as he used to do when he was in Richmond. He is a charming boy and it will give me great pleasure to hear how he is, and where you have sent him to school, and also what he is reading."[xvii]

Allan delayed his response, carelessly writing Ewing's name as "Erwin," an error that confused Poe's early biographers. After informing Ewing that Ellis would pay him the "balance due you on the 15th of March 1818 of $84," Allan continued, "I cannot pay any more expense on a/c of Edwin. You will therefore not consider me responsible for any expenses after the 15th of this month."[xviii]

Allan's letter is dated March 21, which means that it was written six days after the date from which Allan announced he would no longer pay tuition for Edwin Collier. At that time, a transatlantic passage took a month or more, plus the additional time it would take for the letter to reach Ewing. Allan was deliberately squeezing Ewing for two or three months of free tuition. Allan denied that his Richmond business was responsible for his financial obligations, declaring, "I cannot conceive who had a right to warrant Ellis & Allan on my a/c," and in response to Ewing's eager request for news of Edgar, replied stiffly, "Edgar is a fine Boy and I have no reason to complain of his progress."[xix]

Allan's reluctance to continue to support the education of a boy who was most likely his natural son prefigures his later reluctance to continue to support his foster son's education at the University of Virginia and his refusal to pay expenses he already owed for Edgar's room, board, and clothing there. Allan did not hesitate to use his influence, wealth, and position to defraud well-meaning men like Ewing who lacked the means and ability to force him to pay his obligations.

* * *

Allan helped to finance the move to Great Britain with the auction of his household belongings and through the sale of an enslaved man, Scipio, for $600 and the lease of others for $50.[xx] After a journey of 34 days, Allan, Fanny, Nancy Valentine, and Edgar arrived at Liverpool on July 29, 1815. Their passage was rough, and they were seasick. Allan was forced to sleep on the floor of the ship, and the parsimonious captain denied them firewood to broil a bit of bacon to supplement their diet. From Liverpool, the family departed for Scotland, where John Allan was reunited with his sisters in Irvine and Kilmarnock after an absence of more than twenty years. By the end of October, the Allans, Nancy, and Edgar were settled in lodgings on Southampton Row, near Russell Square, with offices for Allan & Ellis a mile and a half away, on Basinghall Street, near St. Andrew's Steps.

Their London beginnings were not auspicious. The city was expensive, and the political

and economic situation was precarious. The cold, rainy climate was disagreeable. The whole family came down with colds and sore throats. Fanny's complaints continue to be a constant refrain of Allan's correspondence. By November, Allan was resigned to remaining five years in England because of the expense of the move and the difficulty of travel, but he assured Ellis, "I would not stay longer on any account."[xxi] In January 1816, Nancy Valentine wrote to their cousin Margaret Nimmo Ellis in Richmond that they were "miserably dissatisfied with London."[xxii] In May 1816, Allan confessed to his Richmond partner, "If [I] get through the year I hope I shall not see such another."[xxiii] In another letter, Allan gave a vivid description of England's economic hardships and social unrest, which affected his ability to do business:

> Since the termination of that long Contest which in its continuance had drenched Europe with Blood, every nation is endeavoring by salutary restrictions & in many cases interdictions to encourage their own manufactories which operates severely on this great Manufacturing Kingdom…thousands that depended upon this work for support are thrown out of employ or are working for wages barely sufficient to keep body & soul together. Taxes heavy, debt large. People discontented & desperate. Revenue falling off & scarcely a hope left of relieving the one or providing for the other. The Prince's Carriage was attacked with stones.[xxiv]

* * *

Poe is the only American writer of his generation to have spent the formative years of his childhood in Europe. Lasting impressions from his five years in England lodged in his memory and found their way into his writing. Critics and biographers have traced the origins of proper names, images, and settings from these years that Poe later embedded in his fiction and poetry.

In addition to the concrete details that Poe imported and transformed, the most lasting influence of his early years abroad on his writing was his bold imaginative claim to the far-flung reaches of the world. His tales of youthful adventures across Europe and Russia convinced his West Point classmates and acquaintances in Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, as well as his early biographers and fervent admirers, such as poet Charles Baudelaire, who translated his works into French and believed that Poe had walked the streets of Paris. With a confidence that came of a cosmopolitan outlook honed in his boyhood, Poe expanded on his tall tales and took for his fictions settings that spanned the known and unknown regions of the world, that he knew only from his reading: modern European capitals and ancient monuments, primeval forests, inaccessible mountains, tropical islands, mines that burrowed deep into the earth, and the raging seas and icy expanses of the Arctic.

He took his ideas from newspaper headlines, the popular culture, other writers and works of literature, histories, mysteries, and lore. He collected stories and odd facts and pondered over them. He set his imagination free to wander and his obsessions to brood, drawing on his darkest fears. He imported into his fiction his love of puzzles and ciphers and layers of complexity, unreliable narrators and opposing points of view.

In his criticism he advocated a formulaic, even mathematical, means of composition. He stressed technique at the expense of everything else. He condemned as plagiarism in others the same influences and liberties that he took for himself. Running like a fault line through Poe's psyche and his life are contradictions between what he said and what he did. This psychic split, or doubling, was the natural condition of his imagination, influenced by the literature of his age, and expressed in the experiences of his upbringing and his education, born to one family, raised by another, belonging completely to neither, alternately doted on and denied.

* * *

Richmond businessman and journalist James H. Whitty (1859-1937) was a Poe biographer and scholar, the editor of his complete poems, and an avid collector of Poe memorabilia. In a 1917 essay, "Poe in Scotland,"[xxv] he reported the story told to him by John Allan Galt, the son of James Galt, who was ten years old when he met the Allans in Irvine after their arrival in Scotland in August 1815. James Galt's son told Whitty that John Allan had intended to leave the six-year-old Edgar with his sister Mary Allan in Irvine, where he would attend the Irvine grammar school. Edgar objected, as did the women of the family. Allan agreed to let Edgar come to London on the condition that James Galt would take him back to Irvine before the end of the year. When the time came, Edgar "kept up an unceasing fuss all the way over," and once his aunt sent him to school, "he sulked, and no manner of coaxing or threats could induce him to attempt any studies."[xxvi] Eventually Allan gave in and allowed Edgar to return to London.

Nothing among Allan's papers suggests that Edgar ever attended the Irvine grammar school, and the accuracy of this story is impossible to confirm. However, the six-year-old Edgar's terror of being abandoned to strangers in a foreign country, just three years after his mother's death left him orphaned, strikes a psychological truth.

The first record we have of his formal education in England is an invoice from the school of the Misses Dubourg, two sisters, at 146 Sloan Street, Chelsea, about three miles from the Allans' home at 47 Southampton Row near then-fashionable Russell Square. The documents suggest that Edgar, who was referred to as "Master Allan," boarded as a student from about April 1816 until probably December 1817, and that his curriculum included spelling, geography, and history. [xxvii] Allan settled the bill through George Dubourg, his clerk and the teachers' brother, paying an extra fee so Edgar could have his own bed.[xxviii]

Masr. Allan's School Acct. to Midsr. 1816.			
Board & Tuition ¼ year	7	17	6
Separate Bed	1	1	0
Washing	0	10	16
Seat in Church	0	3	0
Teachers & Servants	0	5	0
Writing	0	15	0
Do. Entrance	0	10	6

Copy Book, Pens, &c.	0	3	0
Medicine, School Expenses	0	5	0
Repairing Linen, shoe-strings, &c.	0	3	0
Mavor's Spelling	0	2	0
Fresnoy's Geography	0	2	0
Prayer Book	0	3	0
Church Catechism explained	0	0	9
Catechism of Hist. of England	0	0	9
	£12	2	0

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In August 1817, two years after their arrival in England, the Allans took the waters at the Cheltenham spa at the edge of the Cotswolds, about a hundred miles from London, instead of visiting Allan's family in Scotland, despite the objections of Allan's sister Mary. "I was sorry to notice that Mrs. Allans Health was such as to require a change of Air but shall be extremely glad to hear that Cheltenham has been of service to her," she wrote to her brother. "Would a trip to Scotland not have answered the same purpose?"[xxix] Back home, the Allans had taken Edgar on their annual trips to White Sulphur Springs in Virginia,[xxx] but in England, they left the eight-year-old boy at the Dubourg sisters' school. The Allans' main concern was not their ward, but the shipment of a French-speaking parrot. The day after arriving at Cheltenham's Hotel Stiles, Allan wrote to Dubourg:

> Mrs. Allan desires me to add that she expects a Parrot from Liverpool. Should it arrive she will be obliged by your taking care of it…My Head feels a little confused from Drinking the Cheltenham Salts this morning, but I hope to improve my Health eventually by a judicious use of them.[xxxi]

In Virginia, the Allans had also had a parrot, an English-speaking one, whom Edgar claimed as his first teacher: "To me a painted paroquet/Hath been—a most familiar bird--/Taught me my alphabet to say--/To lisp my very earliest word."[xxxii] As a young child, Edgar not only learned from but identified with the parrot. They were both gifted mimics. Like the parrot, Edgar was treated as a pampered pet and commanded to perform. At their dinner parties in Richmond, the Allans bade him climb on the dining table after the meal was finished and give a dramatic recitation from Shakespeare or Robert Burns. In his "Philosophy of Composition," Poe stated that in planning "The Raven," he first considered a parrot, then an owl, before deciding on a raven.[xxxiii]

In subsequent letters, Allan informed Dubourg of the benefits his wife was deriving from the spa treatments. He directed him, "Enclosed is a letter for Edgar, who, if he writes at all, must direct to his Mama, as I do not think she will return with me, as finding her health much improved, she wishes to give the waters a trial of greater duration." Two weeks later, Allan sent Dubourg another payment for Edgar's

school.[xxxiv]

Dubourg appears in Edgar's fiction as the last name of the laundress and one of the witnesses in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." But no description of Edgar's London schooldays survives among his writings. We have only the second-hand testimony of Frederick Thomas, his brother Henry's friend who befriended him after Henry's death. Thomas recalled in later years that Edgar had described his schooldays in London as "sad, lonely, and unhappy."[xxxv] Allan's primary familial concerns were the health of his wife and his complicated relations with his Scottish family.

* * *

William Galt was a wealthy man who never married and had no children. He began his career as a smuggler and transformed himself into a merchant. He had fingers in many pies and made himself indispensable to his clients.

His sister Elizabeth had four daughters and one son, John Allan. William Galt took John Allan under his wing when he was a fatherless teenager and brought him to Richmond. William Galt's brother Thomas had a son also named William Galt, who had three sons, William Galt, Jr. (born 1801), and twins, James and Robert (born 1805). When John Allan returned to Great Britain in 1815, his life became entwined with these three boys, a few years older than Edgar.

At the urging of his uncle, the elder William Galt, John Allan patronized the Galt brothers (his first cousins once removed), taking them into his London business and assisting them in emigrating to Virginia. According to family lore, James Galt slept in the same room as Edgar in Mary Allan's house to prevent him from running away from Irvine. When Edgar returned to London, James accompanied him. Poe's biographer Mary Phillips told the story that in his youth in Scotland, John Allan had been in love with the Galt boys' mother, Jean Malcolm, but she chose to marry Thomas Galt's son William instead, bearing him three sons before she died in 1807. Phillips suggested that John Allan's interest in the three Galt boys sprang from his former feelings for their deceased mother, as well as from a sense of familial duty.[xxxvi]

Robert, who was James' twin, died on the transatlantic voyage in 1819, but William Galt, Jr. and James Galt established themselves in Virginia and prospered. Not only did their great-uncle take them into his business, but at his death in 1825, they were the second beneficiaries of his will after John Allan, "my nephew, the other two, nearest kinsmen of my name, children of my adoption and nurture."[xxxvii] William Galt left the two Galt brothers "three several plantations on the Fluvanna or James River, with a like moiety of the slaves, stocks, and property of all kinds belonging thereto" as well as several properties in the city of Richmond.[xxxviii]

During Allan's London sojourn, he felt a sense of paternal responsibility mingled with rivalry towards these young Galt cousins, as separate branches of the family, descended from William Galt's sister Elizabeth and his brother Thomas, vied for influence over their rich, childless uncle. In October 1816, after Allan had been in England for a year, and William Galt, Jr. was planning to emigrate to Virginia, Allan offered him tendentious advice in the manner of a nineteenth-century Polonius:

> Now my good Boy you will soon be ushered into the World where your own exertions and good sense will be put to the test, never fail to do your Duty to your Creator first, to your Employer next & by all means keep clear of bad company. Mixing with improper characters tends only to make you the slave of vicious Habits which you will avoid as you shun the coiled Serpent.[xxxix]

Writing from Richmond in November 1816, the eldest William Galt held up John Allan as a model to his seventeen-year-old great-nephew and namesake:

> To be both quick and correct is very desirable and such was John Allan, he writes well & very fast, and he is quick in both calculating, extending, and adding; this he acquired when living with me. He is now a clever man at business & I cannot allow myself to doubt that you will be so also. Certain it is that much more pain has been taken in giving you an education than was taken for him and I hope you are as naturally clever as him.[xl]

In March 1817, four months before young Galt's planned July departure, Allan warned him to steer clear of politics in America:

> You will recollect you are to have no Political Opinions, as you go to America as one of its foster Sons it is but right you should be neuter. No man will blame your attachment to the country which gave you Birth, but prudence dictates that you should not say anything about the Government, but the best is to let Politics alone altogether.[xli]

At the same time that Allan was attempting to guide the young Galt's behavior, he felt obliged to defend himself against his sister Elizabeth's accusation that he declined to entertain her family in London because he begrudged "the trifle they would have consumed during their stay."[xlii]

* * *

When not languishing in London, Fanny Allan escaped from her husband in rented houses in the countryside or near the shore. There is only one surviving letter from Fanny to her husband from their English sojourn, written in October 1818, from Dawlish, a seaside resort town nearly 200 miles from London, on the south coast of Devon, known for its mild climate, where she was living with a woman friend, away not only from her husband but from the constant ministrations of her sister. The letter is worth quoting in full for insight into its author. It is one of the few times we hear Fanny speaking in her own voice.

> Dawlish, Oct. 15, 1818
> My dear hubby,
> Your kind letter of the 13 was received this morning and you will perceive I have lost no time in replying to it, however pleasant a duty it may be. I fear it will be long ere I shall write with any facility or ease to

myself, as I find you are determined to think my health better contrary to all I say. It will be needless for me to say more on that subject but be assured I embrace every opportunity that offers for taking air and exercises but at this advanced season of the year we can't expect the weather to be very good. I am this moment interrupted with a message from Mrs. Dunlop requesting I would accompany her in a ride which I shall accept. The Carriage is now at the door.

Friday morning Oct. 16
We had a very long and pleasant ride. We started at two o'clock and did not return until six. The day was remarkably fine. We had a beautyfull view of the surrounding country we had a smart Beau with us who arrived here from London a few days ago. I was very much pressed to go to the ball last night and nothing prevented me from going but the want of a little finery so you and the Doctor may lay aside some of your consequence for I really think you have a great deal of Vanity to imagine you are the cause of all my misery, I only wish my health would admit of my entering into all the gaieties of this place. I would soon let you see I could be as happy and contented without you as you appear to be in my absence as I hear of nothing but parties at home and abroad but long may the Almighty grant my dear husband health and spirits to enjoy them.

Now I must request my dear hubby to get me a nice piece of sheeting and a piece of shirting Cotton as they will be much wanted when I return. Tell Nancy she must get Abbatt to put up the tester and drapery to my bed and the parlour window Curtains to have the bedroom floors well cleaned before the Carpets are put down. Miss G is very well and joins me in kind love to you the girls the Doctor Mrs Rennolds & all friends and believe me my
dear old man yours truly

Frances K. Allan[xliii]

A gamut of emotions is on display in this letter—anger, jealousy, resentment, sarcasm, competition, an exaggerated sense of duty, and a painful, wounded love. Missing is maternal affection. Fanny left no salutation for Edgar in this letter. She didn't mention him at all.

At this time, Edgar was a boarding student at the Manor House School at Stoke Newington, "then a suburb of London, which still retained the separate identity and the antique atmosphere of an old English village. The Academy was exclusively for young gentlemen, of the fairly well-to-do."[xliv] Just as William Ewing's school in Richmond was considered above Clotilda Fisher's school, so, too, the Manor House School was deemed an improvement over the Dubourg sisters' school. Biographers and critics have taken it as a sign of Allan's beneficent concern for his ward that he sent him to an institution of this caliber, which was much more expensive than the school run by the Dubourg sisters. By combining the charges recorded in the office-books of

the firm in the Library of Congress, with actual bills in the Valentine Museum, Poe biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn compiled the following list of Allan's payments to the Manor House School for Edgar's education as follows:

July 24, 1818-- £16 14s 3d
Xmas, 1818 -- £33 2s 1d
Jan. 15, 1819--£69 16s 11d
Feb. 1, 1820--£70 9s 6d
May 26, 1820--£35 4s 10d[xlv]

School fees included £23. 12*s*. 6*d*. for board and education, 3*s*. 6*d*. as pew rent for the privilege of listening to Rev. Bransby's Sunday sermons, £2. 2s. for dancing lessons, as well as additional bills for clothing and shoe repairs, haircuts, a single bed, and other items.[xlvi] The itemized bill for the Fall 1818 term indicates that Edgar was not taught drawing or music that term, and that his allowance was small, only 5s., contradicting Rev. Bransby's later recollection that his student had "an extravagant amount of pocket money."[xlvii] Adding the additional expenses, Quinn concluded that Allan paid Rev. John Bransby £230 from July 1818 to May 1820.[xlviii]

A month after Edgar entered the Manor House School, his hand was injured, requiring medical attention. On August 31, Thomas Smith & Son, a surgical practice at Stoke Newington, billed John Allan 10*s*. 6*d*. to "Dress Hand" of "Mas Allan at Mr Bransbys." On September 18, Allan was billed an additional 2*s*. 6*d*. for "Ointment and Lint" to bandage the wound.[xlix] None of Poe's biographers have determined what manner of injury he sustained to his hand, whether it was the result of an accident, an attack by another student, or a schoolmaster's beating. Among his writings, there is no mention of the hand wound he suffered as a nine-year-old schoolboy, nor did any of his friends or colleagues recall him speaking to them about it. The former Charlottesville clerk Peter Pindar Pease described an encounter with Edgar in New York City's Madison Square in 1831, shortly after he had left West Point, in which Pease observed Edgar's curious habit of holding one hand behind his back as he walked, "slowly rubbing the thumb back and forth over his index finger."[l] It is not known if this was a habitual gesture Edgar adopted after recovering from his childhood wound, or whether it had anything to do with it at all.

Edgar remained at the Manor School almost three years, until the end of May 1820. The next month John and Frances Allan, Nancy Valentine, and Edgar visited Allan's sisters in Irvine one last time. On June 16, 1820, the party embarked on the *Martha* at Liverpool. The voyage to Richmond lasted 36 days.[li]

Mention of Edgar in Allan's correspondence during their time in England is infrequent but positive. In June 1818, shortly before Edgar left for the Manor House School, Allan noted that "Edgar is a fine Boy and reads Latin pretty sharply,"[lii] contradicting Reverend Bransby's later assertion that Edgar arrived at the school ill-prepared for the curriculum.[liii] In September, Allan wrote to his uncle William Galt in Richmond, "Edgar is growing wonderfully and enjoys a good reputation as both able and willing to receive instruction."[liv] The following year, in November 1819, Allan informed Galt, "Edgar is in the Country at School, he is a verry fine Boy & a good Scholar."[lv]

Meanwhile, Fanny Allan was seeking another house to rent with a lady friend, this time in Brighton.[lvi] At best, the Allans were inattentive to Edgar; at worst, cruelly destructive. During the years in England, Allan was too preoccupied with business woes to pay much attention to Edgar or to his wife. The London venture had been a miscalculation. Allan was facing financial ruin.

On Jan. 14, 1817, Allan had written Charles Ellis this good news about their joint business: "Our property should now be worth 140,000 Dollars."[lvii] Yet, by the following year, the English business was failing. By early 1819, Allan was desperately seeking ways to bail out. In the summer, the London branch suspended payments to creditors. While research has failed to locate any bankruptcy record of Allan & Ellis in London, there exists a deed of trust dated May 4, 1819, naming Taylor & Company as the firm that sold out Allan & Ellis, and it seems likely that out-of-court arrangements were made with creditors.[lviii] Poe biographer Mary Phillips referred to "two or more very definite letters from William Galt, Richmond Virginia, who was said to have financed this London venture, indicating that he was not satisfied with Mr. Allan's methods concerning it."[lix] Poe biographer James Whitty believed that in addition to encouraging Allan's patronage of the young Galt brothers, the elderly William Galt enjoined his great-nephew James to report privately on the London business to him in Richmond.[lx] Although William Galt would continue to help support Allan on his return to Richmond and would make him his principal heir, it seems that he did not entirely trust him.

By November 1819, Allan wrote Ellis in despair: "Please bear in mind that I have only about £100 here in the world, and I depend upon you."[lxi] The following month he renewed his plea for cash so that he could take his family home to Richmond: "Frances has the greatest aversion to the sea and nothing but dire necessity and the prospect of a reunion with her old and dear Friends could induce her to attempt it."[lxii] In March 1820, as he was making preparations to leave England, Allan wrote Ellis another letter that was part confession and part urgent request:

> …The truth is Charles we have erred through pride and ambition. I hope we shall yet have an opportunity to conduct our business like sensible and reflecting men. I shall leave the house and furniture standing, live it out for 12 or 18 months ready, should we be in condition, to prosecute our business. If impossible—it is easy getting rid of the furniture, home and all,…Rather than the old way—I would turn farmer or planter. This is a private letter. We must support and encourage each other. F. is getting better. She has to learn what a pleasing sensation is experienced on returning Home—even in Hot weather.[lxiii]

* * *

Nearly two decades after eleven-year-old Edgar's return from England with the Allans, his tale, "William Wilson," was published in the October 1839 issue of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, a Philadelphia-based publication where he had recently obtained the position of assistant editor to publisher William Burton. Seeking a promotional blurb, he sent a copy of the magazine to Washington Irving, the most influential American author of his day, with the hopeful message:

> [If] I could be permitted to add even a word or two from yourself, in relation to the tale of "William Wilson" (which I consider my best effort) my fortune would be made. I do not say this unadvisedly—for I am deliberately convinced that your good opinion, thus permitted to be expressed, would ensure me that public attention which would carry me on to fortune hereafter, by ensuring me fame at once.[lxiv]

Paying homage to Irving, Poe acknowledged that "William Wilson" was inspired by Irving's "An Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron," published in the literary annual, *The Gift of 1836*. Irving's sketch proposed a story Byron outlined but never wrote, in which a mysterious masked figure follows Alfonso, a dissolute Spanish nobleman, interferes with his vicious pursuits, is at last unmasked, and stabbed by him to death.[lxv]

Since his return from Europe in 1832, Irving had taken an interest in promoting younger American writers, and from his home in Tarrytown, New York, he wrote Poe courteously, "I have read your little tale of 'William Wilson' with much pleasure. It is managed in a highly picturesque style, and the singular and mysterious interest is well sustained throughout," adding that he preferred this new work over Poe's story in the September issue of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. In Irving's opinion, that story, "The Fall of the House of Usher," suffered from "too much coloring."[lxvi]

Ignoring the implied criticism, Poe professed to be delighted. Irving's praise was featured prominently in the promotion for *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque,* his short story collection which included "William Wilson," published by Philadelphia firm Lea & Blanchard the following year.

The theme of the *doppelgänger,* expressed in the figure of a mysterious masked double who threatens the dissolute narrator and is threatened by him in return, is a staple of Gothic Romanticism. "His passions, from early and unrestrained indulgence, have become impetuous and ungovernable, and he follows their impulses with a wild and heedless disregard of consequences," wrote Irving of his protagonist Alfonso.[lxvii] Nathaniel Hawthorne also admitted the influence of Irving's "An Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron," in his story, "Howe's Masquerade." All three stories feature a ghostly *doppelgänger*, a climactic scene at a masquerade, a quarrel, and the exposure of incriminating items. In his collection of stories and memoirs from his European travels, *Outre-Mer,* Henry Wadsworth Longfellow recognized Irving's influence as well. Irving, in turn, revealed that "An Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron" was inspired by the character of the masked man in *El Purgatorio de San Patricio,* by the seventeenth-century Spanish playwright Calderón.[lxviii]

Among these texts with their shared characteristics, Poe's "William Wilson" stands out by virtue of its psychological insights, vivid imagery and memorable details, its stunning mix of realism and allegory, and its uncanny evocation of horror. Though it is not horrifying like Poe's tales of premature burial, self-immolation, torture, and suffocation, it terrifies by holding up a mirror that reflects back our nightmares and, in so doing, reveals our true selves. As Poe wrote in the preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque,* "If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that

terror is…of the soul,--that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results."[lxix]

"William Wilson" is presented as a cautionary chronicle told retrospectively by the eponymous narrator, from whom the first thing we learn is that William Wilson is not his real name. His real name is too infamous to disclose, for his crimes are too well-known. Like narrators in Poe's other stories, this William Wilson inherited an unstable, excitable temperament, weak-minded and willful like his parents, who abdicated their responsibility to mold his character. At an early age, he was sent away to boarding school.

The school and its surrounding grounds are so vividly evoked that they, too, seem like a character. At first impression, the school appeared as a romantic refuge, steeped in history and tradition, welcoming the young newcomer:

> My earliest recollections of a school-life are connected with a large, rambling, cottage-built, and somewhat decayed building 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 and inordinately tall. 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 old, fretted, Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep.[lxx]

Yet, this refuge soon revealed itself to be a prison:

> The grounds were extensive, and an enormously 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…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 it inspired! 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 far more solemn meditation.

The church offered the students no respite from academic authority: the principal of the school was also the pastor of the church. As the young Wilson accompanied the other students on their Sunday outings from school to church and back, he struggled with this realization:

> 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!

The students' playground was a barren patch of gravel; the school building a confusing, seemingly endless warren of rooms and passageways. Although William Wilson's school was only two stories tall and in a state of decrepitude, its description is reminiscent of a later literary boarding school, the Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series.:

> There was really no end to its windings, to its incomprehensible sub-divisions. It was impossible, 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.

At the heart of the school building was the schoolroom, resembling a torture chamber of the Inquisition. In his description, Wilson referred to the medieval torture, *peine forte et dure,* in which the victim was slowly pressed to death:

> 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*… A huge bucket with water stood at one extremity of the room, and a clock of stupendous dimensions at the other.

The desks furnishing the schoolroom were arranged in a hodge-podge and so desecrated by generations of students as to be nearly unusable and the books illegible:

> 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 beseamed with initial letters, names at full length, gashes, 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.

On his first day at this school, narrator William Wilson met another student who shared his name. Not only did the two boys resemble each other in appearance, but the narrator will discover that they have the same birthday. Accustomed to dominating his peers by "the ardency, the enthusiasm, and the imperiousness" of his disposition, he discovered he couldn't dominate his namesake. Not only were the two matched competitors in the classroom and on the playing field, but the second William Wilson challenged the assertions of the first William Wilson and refused to submit to his will.

William Wilson I found himself locked in a daily struggle with William Wilson II, of which their classmates and their teachers seemed unaware. William Wilson I uneasily suspected that William Wilson II was more than his match: "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."

William Wilson I couldn't understand William Wilson II's motivation, since his namesake lacked the drive and ambition that he himself found stimulating. He wondered if William Wilson II acted from a whimsical wish to thwart him or, even worse, out of kindness: "there were times when I could not help observing…a certain most inappropriate, and assuredly most unwelcome *affectionateness*."

A strong bond that was neither hatred nor friendship connected them: "my real feelings toward him…were formed of a heterogeneous mixture—some petulant animosity…some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity…Wilson and myself were the most inseparable of companions."

William Wilson I concealed his aggression toward his rival through "the channel of banter or practical joke (giving pain while assuming the aspect of mere fun) rather than into that of a more serious and determined hostility," but his subterfuges were defeated by his rival's "unassuming and quiet austerity" that repelled his barbs. William Wilson II, however, was limited by a disability; a defect in his vocal organs "precluded him from raising his voice at any time *above a very low whisper*."

William Wilson I hated the sound of his name, which to his ears sounded "common" and "plebeian." The constant proximity of the two William Wilsons ensured that he would hear his name spoken all the time, either by others or by his rival. He was further tormented by his rival's imitation of him in dress, manner, even voice: "*his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.*" Even less welcome was William Wilson II's habit of offering advice, "not openly given, but hinted or insinuated."

Only in hindsight does the narrator allow himself to acknowledge that, had he taken

the advice he "cordially hated and bitterly derided," he "might, today, have been a better, and thus happier, man." Instead, the antagonism between the two grew. One day towards the end of their fifth year at the school, thrown off guard by a violent altercation, William Wilson II reacted with uncustomary openness, startling the narrator and "bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy; wild, confused, and thronging memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn…and a belief that myself and the being who stood before me had been acquainted at some epoch very long ago; some point of the past even infinitely remote. The delusion, however, faded rapidly as it came."

Disregarding this insight, William Wilson I planned a malicious practical joke to torment his rival. He crept into the closet that served as his rival's bedroom at night while he was asleep. Shining a light on his rival's sleeping countenance, he was stunned:

> …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 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…Awe-stricken, 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.

William Wilson I tried to expunge his memory, denying what he had seen. He proceeded to Eton College, where he "recklessly plunged" in a "vortex of thoughtless folly." He excelled at breaking the rules and not getting caught, which enhanced his reputation among his classmates. "Three years of folly, passed without profit, had but given me rooted habits of vice." At an all-night "secret carousel in my chamber" attended by the most "dissolute students," the wine flowed freely, and "madly flushed with cards and intoxication, I was in the act of insisting on a toast of more than intolerable profanity, when my attention was suddenly diverted by the violent, although partial unclosing of the door of the apartment."

A stranger of his own size and build awaited him. In the darkness of the vestibule, the stranger's features were indiscernible, but Wilson observed that he was clothed in "a white cassimere morning frock, cut in the novel fashion of the one I myself wore at the moment." Seizing his arm, the stranger whispered the words, "William Wilson!" in his ear:

> It was the pregnancy of solemn admonition in the singular, low, hissing utterance; and, above all, it was the character, the tone, *the key*, of those few, simple, and familiar, yet whispered, syllables, which came with a thousand thronging memories of by-gone days, and struck upon my soul with the shock of a galvanic battery. Ere I could recover the use of my senses he was gone.

Once again, William Wilson dismissed his rival's warning. From Eton, he progressed to Oxford, where "the uncalculating vanity of my parents furnished me with an outfit, and annual establishment, which would enable me to indulge at will in the luxury already so dear to my heart—to vie in profuseness of expenditure with the haughtiest heirs of the wealthiest earldoms of Great Britain."

At Oxford he sunk even lower than at Eton, abandoning his gentlemanly principles to adopt the tricks of a cheater and a card sharp, which enabled him to fleece his fellow students without anyone suspecting him of any vice but "the follies of youth and unbridled fancy" and "a careless and dashing extravagance." Diabolically setting a trap for "a young *parvenu* nobleman, Glendinning," who was said to be immensely wealthy, he orchestrated a party in the chambers of an unsuspecting student, where he encouraged Glendinning to drink and challenged him to a card game. On the verge of achieving victory, William Wilson I was confronted with the realization that Glendinning was not as rich as he seemed, and he was now ruined.

Stung by the reproachful glances of his fellow students, William Wilson I saw the door fling open, and in the ensuing breeze, every candle was extinguished. Concealed in the shadows was a man wrapped in a cloak, who, "in a low, distinct, and never-to-be-forgotten *whisper* which thrilled to the very marrow of my bones," accused him of cheating at cards and urged his companions to search him.

He was seized, and the incriminating evidence found on his person. Faced with contempt, he departed "with a resolute scowl of defiance" and the next day fled Oxford for the continent "in a perfect agony of horror and shame." Everywhere he went after that—Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Egypt—"the William Wilson of my schoolboy days" pursued him, intervening "to frustrate those schemes, or to disturb those actions, which, fully carried out, might have resulted in bitter mischief." Although his tormentor never showed his face, he could not fail to recognize his "arch-enemy and evil genius."

> The sentiments of deep awe with which I habitually regarded the elevated character, the majestic wisdom, the apparent omnipresence and omnipotence of Wilson, added to a feeling of even terror, with which certain other traits in his nature and assumptions inspired me, had operated, hitherto, to impress me with an idea of my own utter weakness and helplessness…I now began to feel the inspiration of a burning hope, and at length nurtured in my secret thoughts a stern and desperate resolution that I would submit no longer to be enslaved.

During the carnival in Rome, William Wilson I attended a masquerade at the palazzo of the Duke di Broglio. Disguised in a large Spanish cloak, with a black silk mask entirely covering his face, he was looking forward to the assignation he had made with the elderly Duke's beautiful young wife, when he "felt a light hand laid upon my shoulder, and that ever-remembered, low, damnable whisper within my ear." Erupting into fury, he forced his rival into an antechamber and commanded him to draw his sword. In the brief contest that followed, he overpowered his rival, stabbing him repeatedly.

On the verge of death, a transformation occurs. In a corner of the small room, a mirror materializes. At the narrator's approach, the reflection shows him his "own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood…with a feeble and tottering gait."

But, no, he is mistaken. The mask and cloak lie discarded on the ground. The face he beholds is his exact likeness, and the body "in all the agonies of dissolution," is his own.

It was Wilson, but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said —

> "*You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead — dead to the world and its hopes. In me didst thou exist — and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself*."

* * *

Critics have tended to interpret "William Wilson" as a conflict between an individual and his conscience: "William Wilson spends his life running from his conscience and its counsels to stick to the straight and narrow… The story…[is] a plea for sympathy from his fellow man as he nears the grave. The ultimate message: You disregard your conscience at your own peril."[lxxi] "The story's ambiguous ending implies that the narrator may have killed himself."[lxxii]

> The specific enemy-face our William Wilsons wear is that of the Critic [noted author Anne Pillsworth]. Our William Wilsons …aren't Critics tearing down others to build themselves up. They aren't just plain ignorant or just plain biased. They are the heartbreaking Critics who understand us, who love and believe in our work, who try to wrest us out of whatever morass we insist on sinking in, because in rescuing us they rescue themselves.[lxxiii]

In his essay, "'William Wilson': The Double as Primal Self," Eric W. Carlson suggested that "the second William Wilson represents the central or transcendent Self-described by Romantic writers and by such psychologists as Carl Jung. Without harmony with this 'Self,' successful individuation is impossible, as Wilson discovers."[lxxiv]

Of the horror conjured by Poe in "William Wilson," Jacke Wilson wrote,

> Imagine meeting yourself, only you're not friends. The person who looks like you, who is you, wants something from you, wants to impose his will on you. Will, son. Maybe it's the son of your own will. That's been suggested by some critics. William Wilson, Will's son. Maybe you've willed this creature into being, maybe you want this person to exist so badly that you yourself have just imagined him being there. Maybe you see him because he fills some absence. Maybe you see him because you're insane. Or maybe he's sent by some other force, some supernatural, demonic force.

> Poe doesn't reveal whether the narrator is insane in the narration. He keeps things rational. He tells the story almost calmly, in a measured way. Not wild-eyed and sweaty like some of his other narrators. That's deliberate, of course. That's the effect he's going for with "William Wilson"… Here was a man at war with himself. Is that what pulls him into two? The two William Wilsons? Or is there something else going on?[lxxv]

Maryn Cavalier and Breanna Kent maintain that Wilson's "defiance of the laws" began when he met his double: "The extremes of his personality surface and, as he resists his other half, his morals deteriorate. He sees and hears his inner demon as if it were a real person. In his struggle against his double, he struggles against himself and loses by winning."[lxxvi]

Critics have also teased out the facts and the inventions in this most autobiographical of Poe's tales. Thomas Mabbott discovered that in his youth Poe knew of two merchants named William Wilson with whom John Allan did business. David Jackson found a third William Wilson, who was a Richmond schoolmaster in 1820, the year Edgar returned with the Allans from England.[lxxvii]

The two William Wilsons share Poe's birthday, January 19. Poe altered the year twice in subsequent versions of the story, from 1809 to 1811 and then 1813, exactly as he advanced the year of his own birth by two, then four, years.[lxxviii] Mary Phillips believed that the Rev. Bransby of "William Wilson" was based on a composite of the actual Rev. John Bransby, the rector and headmaster of the Manor House School and Rev. George Gaskin, who was rector of St. Mary's Church in Stoke Newington during Poe's student days.[lxxix] Poe attended the school for three years, from ages eight to 11, from July 1818-May 1820, instead of for five years, from ages ten to 15, as Wilson does.

The original Manor House which gave Poe's school its name was destroyed in 1695. The school building in Poe's day was an ordinary eighteenth-century square building,[lxxx] rather than the fantastical creation depicted in "William Wilson." According to Mary Phillips, Poe based his description of Rev Bransby's School on St. Mary's Mission, a convent which stood just two hundred yards from the Manor House School.[lxxxi] The school and convent no longer exist, and the fields where Poe paraded with his classmates are long gone.

Today the town celebrates its association with Poe. On the building at No 172 Stoke Newington Church Street, where the school once stood, a bust of Poe commissioned by The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Prague and a Brown Memorial Plaque were unveiled on June 4, 2011.[lxxxii]

The college William Wilson attends, while disguised as Oxford and referred to as "the most dissipated university in England," evokes the University of Virginia during Poe's brief student career. Poe had a college friend named John Preston, just as Wilson does. Wilson's college career comes to a crisis because of a card game where large quantities of alcohol are consumed, and a large sum of money is lost, events which led to Poe's downfall at the University of Virginia.

Critics and biographers have assumed that Poe's depiction of Wilson's willful childhood, his domination over his family and his fellow classmates, is a self-portrait. The actual Rev. Bransby, who "in after years was said to have been considerably nettled by the use of his name in the story,"[lxxxiii] left the following reminiscence: "Edgar Allan was a quick and clever boy and would have been a very good boy if he had not been spoilt by his parents, but they spoilt him and allowed him an extravagant amount of pocket money which enabled him to get into all manner of mischief — still I liked the boy — poor fellow, his parents spoilt him!"[lxxxiv]

Arthur Hobson Quinn's examination of John Allan's account books and correspondence indicated that Bransby's recollection was wrong and in fact Edgar was not oversupplied with funds, but only allowed the modest sum of 5s. pocket money per term.[lxxxv] Nevertheless, Mary Phillips declared, "Evidence from such a source, as to Poe's strong mind and as *strong will*, cannot be set aside. It is of record that the bright, mentally endowed boy soon became a leader of his Stoke Newington schoolmates and so continued to the close of his student days there."[lxxxvi]

Because the Manor House School charged robust fees and educated the sons of the upper middle class, Poe's biographers and critics from the nineteenth century up to the present day have assumed that the Manor House School was "an excellent English school"[lxxxvii] (Hervey Allen's words), "a good boarding school" (recent blog).[lxxxviii] We have no record of the curriculum Poe studied or the books he read as a student there. Hervey Allen mused hopefully, "There must have been something more than mere textbooks about the school somewhere," yet acknowledged that, like the "much-bethumbed" and mutilated old textbooks "piled desperately" on the "time-worn" tables in Rev. Bransby's schoolroom, "English grammar schools of the period were amazingly innocent of anything but the dog-eared Latin grammars, spellers, cheap editions of Homer, Vergil, and Caesar, and the ponderous arithmetics of the period."[lxxxix] Poe' descriptions in "William Wilson" of instruction that consisted of "connings" and "recitations;" harsh disciplinary methods (the reverend who "with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy"); and a general climate of fear are consistent with other boarding schools of Poe's day and afterwards. Whether this constituted an "excellent" or even "good" education is open to question.

* * *

Jorge Luis Borges counted Poe among the writers most important to him. He first encountered Poe in the original English in his father's library when he was a child, and he continued to read and reread him all his life. In Borges' story, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote," Menard, a Poe disciple, declares that he "cannot imagine the universe" without the line "Ah, bear in mind this garden was enchanted!" from Poe's poem "To Helen." But it was Poe's fiction that was most important to Borges. Earlier Latin American writers had revered Poe as a poet-prophet. Borges was responsible for bringing Latin American readers to an appreciation of Poe's fiction.

In his essay "Kafka and His Precursors," Borges developed the idea that a later writer creates his precursors "by affecting the minds of his readers so that when they read

older texts, they take their previous readings of newer texts into the experience with them and thus find remnants or strains of the newer texts in the older writings."[xc] On one level a reader may experience an uncanny impression that the work he is reading was written by an author who lived after the work was published. On a second level, the experiences of reading later texts may awaken heightened or new perceptions in readers returning to earlier texts. Level two goes beyond feeling that a text resembles the work of a later writer. Even without the anachronistic feeling, one's rereading of the text is changed. As Borges observed, "A writer's work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."[xci]

Appearances can be deceiving. Poe's stories are layered with complexity. It is as much an error to assume that William Wilson is Poe's self-portrait as it is to assume that Humbert Humbert, the narrator in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita,* speaks for its author. Poe was a great influence on Nabokov, and Humbert Humbert is William Wilson in another guise. By inviting the reader into his secrets, Humbert Humbert, like William Wilson, seduces the reader into believing in him. Both characters possess powers of persuasion to convince the reader that the truth is a lie. In the face of Lolita's innocence, Humbert declares her to be the seducer, just as William Wilson maintains that his double, who desires his friendship and intervenes to stop his crimes, is his "arch-enemy and evil genius."

Humbert confiscates Lolita's life, turning her into a reincarnation of Annabel Leigh (another Poe reference!), his lost unfulfilled young love. Lolita's life and her life story are taken from her. She belongs to a category of victims who have no defense and are not given a chance to articulate their own story. Yet she evades Humbert at every turn. He never succeeds in possessing her willingly. In the end Humbert is destroyed, and the "horrid little brat" is shown to be brave and resilient. Humbert may have imprisoned Lolita, but he was never able to dominate or destroy her. Despite the isolation of her imprisonment, she preserves her sense of self and eventually succeeds in finding happiness in her "sordid" and "decent" marriage to ordinary Dick.

The evil epithets that William Wilson casts on his rival are self-descriptions. By murdering the second William Wilson, he destroys himself. While the story has generally been interpreted as a conflict between an individual and his conscience, it also bears reading as a close examination of a specific form of "soul murder" that has been endemic to the institution of the English boarding school for generations. Originally employed by Freud, the term "soul murder" has come to be used to describe abused children who experience psychic splits.[xcii] The writings of former boarding school students, both fiction and non-fiction, as well as case studies and research by eminent psychologists, invite us to re-examine "William Wilson" as one of the earliest and most sensitive investigations of the culture that thrived in these schools and the effects of such an education on students. As William Wilson declares, "If there be on earth a supreme and unqualified despotism, it is the despotism of a master mind in boyhood over the less energetic spirits of his companions."

John Bowlby and the British school of object-relations psychologists studied human psychology, not as the result of instinctual drives, as Freud hypothesized, but in terms of emotional attachments. Children sent off to boarding school suffered a break in their

bond with their parents. This was the purpose: to replace infantile loyalties with ties that bind the team. According to Dr. Joy Schaverien, who is renowned for her work with survivors of what has come to be known as "boarding school syndrome,"[xciii] the purpose of boarding schools was to inculcate masculine principles and create political leaders. The side effects of this abrupt intervention in a six- or eight-year-old's development could be savage. Symptoms addressed by therapists include problems with anger, depression, anxiety, failure to sustain relationships, fear of abandonment, and substance abuse. "Emotional cruelty is what exacts the greatest toll on the developing mind. Children are resilient, they can recover from physical hurt… what most reliably damages children is long-term emotional neglect, the absence of safety, the failure of justice, the loss of love."[xciv]

From an early age, children have an ethical sensibility, and when it is violated by brutality, the result is traumatic. Trauma affects children's normal brain development. They learn to cut themselves off from compassion at their predicament. Eventually, traumatized children, exhausted by perpetual fear, may be forced for their own survival to separate their selves—the vulnerable home self and the boarding school self.[xcv]

Nick Duffell, an English authority on boarding school syndrome, appeared on national British television to blame the United Kingdom's political predicament and the problems of Brexit on the fact that its political leaders have been educated in boarding schools. Their education did not result in creating men of vision and substance, ready to guide their country through crises.

> In Britain, it's widely accepted that the leaders of the country will and should have a boarding school education. They have a very strong ESPRIT DE CORPS, which means that in all kinds of institutions ... and particularly Parliament, they are welcomed, and they know how to play the game. Partly, the game is to bully anyone who shows any signs of vulnerability ... At the heart of this is that children are betrayed by their families for the sake of privilege. They lose their childhood, and they betray themselves in order to survive by cutting off their most natural parts of themselves.
>
> The compensation for the loss of their childhood, I think, is what makes their entitled attitudes, and in wounded leaders I call it the "entitlement illusion." The whole country is under this spell, and you can see that actually they're not in fact very resilient, they're very anxious underneath. Although boarding school graduates make terrible leaders, they make terrific spies. As a child in boarding school, you learn to reinvent yourself. The elite members of the British secret service were boarding school graduates, as are the spies in John le Carré's espionage novels. You become very good at putting on a personality, you become a master of disguises and actually you're very good at operating strategically, which means sometimes, as le Carré says, the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. You can create alternative versions, realities, without really being bothered by the fact that you're lying. But this ability to lie strategically without even realizing doesn't translate well to politics and government, as the world has seen

recently.[xcvi]

In Poe's day and afterwards, English boarding school students grew up to become adults who expanded the reach of the British Empire and extended its domination over colonial populations. If the ideal of the gentleman was to exemplify higher humanistic values, the reality was quite different. The world was a brutal place. Instead of checking their appetites, practicing moderation, and propagating humanistic values, the gentlemen in the service of the Empire personified white ruling class racism. Their belief in their innate superiority fueled a legacy of oppression.

Was a classical gentleman's education meant to admit useful and valued men to the gentry, or was it a means to enforce class privilege and keep intruders out? Respect came from fear. Young boys were bullied, beaten, starved, and brutalized. They were abused physically, mentally, emotionally, and sometimes sexually. And then, after a few years, they were allowed to do to others—younger and less powerful than they—what had been done to them. Thus, they were educated at being the slaves and the masters. And because they ended up being the masters, they had a vested interest in perpetuating the system. Instead of teaching honesty, humility, disinterested beneficence, and brotherly love, this education encouraged cheating, intrigue, and insurrection. It taught boys how to be sneaks and spies, how to get away with breaking the rules.

In the United States, the English boarding school model was adapted to the local culture, which in the American South meant the institution of slavery based on race. Historian Nell Irvin Painter, who has studied the psychodynamics of slavery in antebellum America, adopted the term "soul murder" to describe the deadening of conscience among the privileged master class. She offered the following example:

> John Nelson was a Virginian who spoke in 1839 about his own coming of age… He says, when he was a child, when his father beat their slaves, that he would cry and he would feel for the slave who was being inflicted with violence. He would feel almost as if he himself were being beaten, and he would cry. And he would say, "Stop, stop!" And his father, "You have to stop that. You have to learn to do this, yourself." And as John Nelson grew up, he did learn how to do it. And he said in 1839 that he got to the point where he not only didn't cry; he could inflict a beating himself and not even feel it.[xcvii]

Poe's formal education occurred within all-male student environments, with the possible exception of Clotilda Fisher's school which he attended when he was five years old. The academic cultures in which he was educated and the merchant cultures of Allan and the Galts emphasized a rugged masculinity. In an 1816 letter from Allan to William Galt, after Allan had been in London one year, Allan described himself to his uncle as "your Humble Servant as hard as a lightwood knot."[xcviii]

At no time in Poe's life could *he* have been thought of "as hard as a lightwood knot." As a young boy, his health was fragile, due to his poverty-stricken infancy. When he was four years old, he came down with "hooping cough" and "meazels"[xcix] over a three-months span. He rallied to become a slight but healthy boy, "thin as a razor" as Allan

described him, and so attractive that, decades after his death, there were Richmond residents who still recalled the "lovely little fellow, with dark curls and brilliant eyes,"[c] who accompanied the Allans to While Sulphur Springs in the years before their departure for England in 1815.

During the early years of his childhood in Richmond, Poe preferred the company of girls. He had a few close male friends throughout his life, but he naturally gravitated towards women, and women were drawn to him. As an adolescent, he took pride in his clothes and appearance. When he entered the University of Virginia, he looked young for his age, which was only seventeen, but by the time he enrolled in West Point four years later, the hardships and difficulties he had endured had aged him so that he appeared older than he was. The gentleman's magazines at which he labored for most of his career were also all-male establishments that stressed manly values.

Poe wanted to be thought of as manly, and his early biographers emphasized his athletic prowess at swimming and running and interpreting his adolescent friendships and crushes as ill-starred romances. But most of his contemporaries commented on the delicacy of his appearance. Delicacy is not a manly quality. In his early twenties in Baltimore, he was described as "slender, but graceful in person; his hands and feet were as beautiful as a woman's. His dress was faultlessly neat; fashionable, but not foppish."[ci] Another description when he was in his thirties in Philadephia also emphasized his feminine appearance:

> Poe was a slight, small-boned, delicate looking man, with a well-developed head, which, at a glance seemed out of proportion to his slender body. His features were regular, his complexion pale; his nose was Grecian and well-molded, his eyes large and luminous, and when excited, peculiarly vivid and penetrating.[cii] (1843, Poe is 34)

His best friend during his early twenties in Baltimore was Lambert Wilmer. They shared literary ambitions and dreamed of editing a literary magazine together. After Poe's death, Wilmer denied rumors that Poe pursued women. Rather than a man of predatory masculinity, a man like John Allan, for example, Poe reminded Wilmer of a vestal virgin worshiping a lifeless goddess at the altar of Art: "Of all men that I ever knew he was the most *passionless;* his writings are a confirmation of this. The female creations of his fancy are all either statues or angels. His conversation, at all times, was as chaste as that of a vestal, and his conduct…was correspondingly blameless."[ciii]

Yet some found his extreme sensitivity indecent. The writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson said Poe had "the look of over-sensitiveness which when uncontrolled may prove more debasing than coarseness."[civ] Writing in 1866, Wilmer believed that given the standards of their culture, Poe's effeminacy was even more of an obstacle for him than his drinking.[cv]

Poe gave his character William Wilson his own birthday and some of his observations and reflections, but in the most important aspects, William Wilson is defined by what Poe is *not*. Poe understood the behavior and motivation of bullies, not because he was a bully himself, but because he had suffered from bullies nearly all his life at home and

at school.

Our understanding of boarding school syndrome enables our perception that when the Allans sent Edgar to the Manor House School, it was as if he were being symbolically orphaned a second time. He was orphaned once more when John Allan kept the news of Fanny's mortal illness from him and prevented him from attending her funeral. Allan's continued rejections culminated in his complete disinheritance, a denial that there had ever been any ties between them at all.

Poe could be "cuttingly rude and bitterly sarcastic" and "impatient of restraint or contradiction."[cvi] His difficult attitudes—his boasting, prickliness, pettiness, contempt, anger, and hypersensitivity to slights--indicate faults exacerbated by his upbringing and his educational experiences. He was inculcated with the idea that as a gentleman, he was entitled to privileges. The culture of the gentleman was one of bullying, domination, violence, intimidation. The cruelty of the masters was accepted and adopted by the victims. Much of Poe's behavior can be explained by his having been abused at home and at school, where he experienced, in Dr. Schaverien's words, "emotional cruelty and neglect, the absence of safety, the failure of justice, the loss of love."

Like Dr. Schaverien's survivors of boarding school syndrome, Poe suffered from problems of "anger, depression, anxiety, failure to sustain relationships, fear of abandonment, and substance abuse."[cvii] His ability to create convincing alternate selves, which began with the stories of adventures he fabricated for his classmates and culminated in his great fictions, were born of a psychic split that enabled him to survive and endure in the troubled atmospheres of school and home. Nick Duffell's descriptions of the master spies who learned their trade in boarding school can be applied to Poe: "a master of disguises…good at putting on a personality…and operating strategically…You can create alternative versions, realities, without really being bothered by the fact that you're lying."[cviii]

William Wilson's excesses and dissipations, his profitless frivolities and careless extravagance, describe behavior that Edgar witnessed among the entitled scions of wealthy Southern families at the University of Virginia. Wilson's absentee parents have abdicated all responsibility for his upbringing. As readers, we never come into contact with them, even when Wilson is living at home. They let him run wild as a boy, an adolescent, a young man. It is their "uncalculating vanity" that causes them to lavish money on him. They believe that their son's standing among his classmates, bolstered by wealth, will reflect their own importance. They never "calculate" the consequences of their indulgence or their neglect.

Edgar knew men like William Wilson at the University of Virginia, who threatened their classmates, terrorized their professors, and beat their slaves. Their harassment extended beyond the university. The local police had no jurisdiction over them, and the Board of Trustees hesitated to discipline them. They operated without a moral compass. They spent money as if it didn't matter, because there would always be more.

Edgar was not one of them. John Allan was a tight-fisted Scotsman who never gave

anyone anything without extracting something in return. Allan always kept Edgar on a tight purse-string. He sent Edgar off to college before he was ready to go because he wanted him out of the house. Nor did Allan supply Edgar with enough money to pay for his college fees and expenses, even though, by then, he was one of the richest men in Virginia, thanks to William Galt. It was frail Fanny Allan who made the arduous journey by horse-drawn coach over rough mountain roads in the February cold to take Edgar to college. Allan declined to see him off.

In his early letters home, Edgar conveyed his shock at the riotous violence, extravagance, and bullying he witnessed among his classmates. He avoided their fights. Among his classmates, he was known for his artistic eccentricities—the life-like drawing he made of Byron on his ceiling so he could see the poet's face as he lay in bed and his ability to write with both hands at once. He was not censured for drinking as others were, and his academic record was excellent. He got himself into trouble for gambling out of desperation, not from a wish to dominate his classmates. In debt for college fees and additional expenses, he couldn't think of another way to raise the money he owed. It was said that the gambling losses that caused his departure from the University of Virginia were not due to his lack of skill or bad luck, but because the game he lost was rigged. [source?]

Edgar's resemblance is not to William Wilson, but to Wilson's target, the "young *parvenu* nobleman Glendinning" who is not as rich as his classmates think, and who is the victim of cheating. When Edgar's gambling led him into debt, his classmates assumed that the wealthy Allan would bail him out, like their fathers did. But Edgar was forced to flee Charlottesville to escape his creditors. Allan even refused Edgar's landlord the money he had already contracted to pay for room and board.

Edgar's recklessness and profligacy at the University of Virginia were born of despair. His drinking was not a pleasure but a violence against himself. He almost seemed to will himself to lose. William Wertenbaker, the university librarian, who befriended him, told the story how, in a desperate mood before he was to depart the university, Edgar burned up his furniture to keep warm. The cost of the furniture represented a substantial investment, nearly twenty percent of all the money Allan had given him for school. It would have been prudent of him to sell it, but he consigned it to the flames.

* * *

An obsession with social class is one of "William Wilson's" motifs. Like other Poe narrators, Wilson is descended from an aristocratic family in mental decline, heir to "an imaginative and easily excitable temperament." He is tormented by his name which sounds "plebeian" and "uncourtly," "the common property of the mob." When his double appears, he is forced to hear his name spoken aloud often. Because he feels threatened by the loss of social status, he is driven to dominate his classmates. He appears to play by the rules, but he will do what it takes to win. It is no accident that he chooses "a young *parvenu* nobleman," a newcomer to the nobility, as his target. In Poe's day it meant the son of a middle-class family wealthy enough to purchase a noble title.

The French poet Charles Baudelaire, who idolized Poe and translated him into French,

assumed that Poe, like many of his narrators, was an aristocrat *manqué*. But by birth and upbringing, Poe was middle-class. His father's father was a tradesman. His father, who was groomed to be a lawyer, rebelled to join the theater. His mother and his mother's mother were English actresses who emigrated to America. If there was any "aristocracy" that Poe claimed, it was to the most infamous member of the United States' founding generation, the notorious traitor Benedict Arnold. Whether he truly believed that his mother was Arnold's illegitimate daughter, or whether it was one of the many stories that he told about himself, remains a mystery.

John Allan experienced tremendous ups-and-downs, brought on by his own misjudgments and by political and economic circumstances beyond his control. When the Allans returned to Richmond from London in 1820, they were so broke they had to move in with Charles Ellis and his family. Ellis & Allan failed to prosper, and in 1824 it was dissolved by mutual consent. By then, William Galt was an old man, and Allan had rising expectations. In January 1824 he made the following entry in his journal: "

> My Uncle [William Galt] said that he was establishing his present business for all our interests, that I was so hobbled [by creditors] that I could not be Known but that Wm. [Galt, Jr.] should have a third when James [Galt] became a Citizen he should have a third & when I was at Liberty I should have his third but this he did not wish mentioned.[cix]

When Galt died the following March 1825, his will, signed and witnessed the previous day, made Allan his principal heir. Overnight, Allan became a wealthy man. He purchased one of the finest homes in Richmond, so imposing it had a name, Moldavia. For a few months, Poe had use of a spacious room with a balcony, where he could pursue his interest in astronomy with a telescope that Allan had imported from London. To his classmates, he might have seemed like "a young *parvenu* nobleman," and he might have thought so himself.

* * *

Poe was thirty years old when he wrote "William Wilson," and he had been through many vicissitudes. He had experienced hardships and reversals that the William Wilsons of this world are spared. Cast out of Allan's home at the age of eighteen, he had hoped somehow to make his fame and fortune, like many an ambitious teenager before and since. Instead, without friends, funds, family, or connections, he embarked on a downward social spiral. He survived on odd jobs for low pay, until he enlisted in the Army. He served with working-class men and was stationed at coastal forts. At first, a military career beckoned like a solution, until it didn't. Although he never abandoned hope that he would make his fame and fortune as a man of letters, the success he anticipated time and again morphed to failure. Even when his life was in tatters, he clung to his sense of entitlement as a gentleman, but to his ongoing chagrin and dismay, he discovered that the social class he had abandoned hesitated to welcome him back.

William Wilson's double talks in a whisper, but Wilson can hear him speaking like a shadow of his own voice. He hears him, despite his wish not to hear him. The double offers advice, which is not heeded; then warnings, which are not heeded; and then he

intervenes to prevent Wilson's crimes. With each defeat, Wilson's hatred grows. For all of the accusations that he flings at his double—"Scoundrel! Imposter! Accursed villain"—he cannot stop or silence him. Poe's precise depictions of the range and progression of uncomfortable emotions that Wilson's double evokes in him is a triumph of the story.

Wilson's pursuit of sensation is an attempt to deaden himself to self-knowledge. In one of the story's most poignant moments, self-knowledge appears to him as an inkling that once, in a time before memory, he and his double had been known to each other. Something in his double's "accent, his air, and general appearance" startles Wilson, "bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy; wild, confused, and thronging memories." But the vision fades, and Wilson convinces himself that it was a delusion. Had he welcomed the insight, he and his double might have reconciled. It was not preordained that they remain adversaries. It is a choice that Wilson makes freely, without understanding the consequences until it is too late. A tinge of regret pervades the ending. It didn't have to be this way.

Author Marilynne Robinson observed:

> Poe's great tales turn on guilt concealed or denied, then abruptly and shockingly exposed. He has always been reviled or celebrated for the absence of moral content in his work, despite the fact that these tales are all straightforward moral parables. For a writer so intrigued by the operations of the mind as Poe was, an interest in conscience leads to an interest in concealment and self-deception, things that are secretive and highly individual and at the same time so universal that they shape civilizations.[cx]

Poe's mind was more subtle than his adversaries, but he still lost out to them. There are few writers who have understood so well as he the urge toward self-destruction. "William Wilson" is a mysterious tale that strikes at the heart of identity. It calls into question the nature of self-knowledge. And it offers a profound indictment of Poe's "gentleman's education," how it splits the soul and kills empathy.

NOTES:

[i] Edgar Allan Poe, "Omniana," Part 1, *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine,* Vol. VI, no. 4, April 1840, 161-162. The authorship of this series is not certain, but its attribution has been accepted by many Poe scholars. **https://www.eapoe.org/works/misc/omnian01.htm**
[ii] David Castronovo, *The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society.* New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1987, pp.54-55.
[iii] Ibid., pp.59, 57.
[iv] Quoted in Ibid., p.57.
[v] Quoted in Ibid.
[vi] Ibid. p.59.
[vii] Quoted in Alex Renton, "School of Hard Knocks: the Dark Underside to Boarding School Books," *The Guardian,* April 8, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/08/school-boarding-secrets-crimes-alex-renton-kipling-rowling-dahl-churchill
[viii] Ibid.
[ix] Alex Renton, "Boarding School Syndrome Review—education and the pain of separation," *The Guardian,* June 8, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/08/boarding-school-syndrome-joy-schaverien-review
[x]Alex Renton, "School of Hard Knocks: the Dark Underside to Boarding School Books," https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/08/school-boarding-secrets-crimes-alex-renton-kipling-rowling-dahl-churchill.
[xi] John Allan to Margaret Nimmo, Feb.26, 1811, quoted in Quinn, "Chapter 02," *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (1941), pp. 51-64 https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/quinnc02.htm
[xii]Ellis-Allan Letter Books, 1815-17, Library of Congress, quoted in Quinn, "Chapter 03," *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (1941), pp. 65-80 https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/quinnc03.htm
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[xxix] *The Poe Log,* entries of August 1817, https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/tplgc01a.htm
[xxx] Ibid. Summer 1812, also (Didier [1877], p. 28).]
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[xxxiii] *The Poe Log,* entries of August 1817, https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/tplgc01a.htm
[xxxiv] Ibid.
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[xxxvi] Mary E. Phillips, "Section 02," *Edgar Allan Poe: The Man* (1926), pp. 111-231
[xxxvii] In the Appendix to his biography, *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe,* Hervey Allen reproduces the will of William Galt, Sr. Text: Hervey Allen, "Appendix 03," *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (1926), volume 2, pp. 857-873. https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/hva262a3.htm When Galt devised his will, James Galt was not yet a naturalized U.S. citizen. He would receive his share once he was naturalized.
[xxxviii] Ibid.
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[xlii] E. V. Valentine Collection. The letter, in John Allan's hand, is not signed. It is evidently a draft of a letter which was not sent, or, possibly, a copy of one really forwarded. Reported in Arthur Hobson Quinn, "Chapter 03," *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (1941), pp. 65-80 https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/quinnc03.htm#pn03029
[xliii] Quinn, (44)
[xliv] Hervey Allen, "Chapter 05," *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (1926), volume 1, pp. 63-89 https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/hva26105.htm
[xlv] Quinn, Ch.3, Schooldays in England, link
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[l] "A Prohibitionist Shakes Dice with Poe." Theodore Pease Stearns. *The Outlook*, Sept. 1, 1920, Quoted in Phillips, https://www.eapoe.org/papers/misc1921/mep1ch03.htm#tn030043
[li] *The Poe Log,* entries of May-June, 1820, also (Phillips, 1:171).

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[liii] Find Rev Bransby
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[lv] *The Poe Log,* entry of Nov. 27, 1819.
[lvi] Ibid., entry of Nov. 21, 1819, see also (Quinn, p. 79).
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[lix] Ibid. The letters are in the Ellis-Allan papers at the Library of Congress.
[lx] Noted in Ibid.
[lxi] *The Poe Log,* entry of November 29, 1819.
[lxii] Quoted in Quinn, Ch.3, "School Days in England," link
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[lxiv] http://storyoftheweek.loa.org/2020/01/william-wilson.html [or different link?]
[lxv] Robert D. Jacobs, "Wallace, Poe, and Plagiarism," *Poe Studies*, June 1979, Vol. XII, No. 1, 12:23-24 https://www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/index.htm#ps19791
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[lxxii] "The Death of Young Edgar Poe: Some Observations on 'William Wilson." http://Boroughsofthedead.com/seasonal-and-specialty-tours/
[lxxiii] Anne Pillsworth, https://www.tor.com/2018/05/09/worse-than-an-evil-twin-edgar-allan-poes-william-wilson/
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[lxxv] "On Edgar Allan Poe's Creepy Doppelgänger story, 'William Wilson,'" *Lithub.* https://lithub.com/on-edgar-allen-poes-creepy-doppelganger-story-william-wilson/
[lxxvi] https://prezi.com/gani1af49-8e/edgar-allan-poes-william-wilson/
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[lxxviii] https://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4905000.htm An unsigned selection of miscellany in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine,* most probably written by Poe, read, "The infirmity of falsifying our age is at least as old as the time of Cicero, who, hearing one of his contemporaries attempting to make out that he was ten years younger than he really was, very drily remarked, 'Then, at the time you and I were at school together, you were not born.'" https://www.eapoe.org/works/misc/omnian01.htm
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[lxxx] according to scholar James Hutchisson (*Poe*, 2005, p. 11). Marthe Cuvelier, 'Mapping William Wilson by Edgar Allan Poe' http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/dighum/2017/12/11/marthe-cuvelier-mapping-william-wilson-by-edgar-allan-poe/
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[xc] Emron Esplin, *Borges' Poe: The Influence and Reinvention of Edgar Allan Poe in Latin America,* New Southern Studies Series, 2016, https://www.amazon.com/dp/0820349054/ref=rdr_ext_tmb

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Anne Whitehouse's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Gentleman's Education* is the third Poe essay published in *Open: Journal of Arts & Letters Buttonhook Press* Chapbook series, after *The Imp of the Perverse: Edgar Allan Poe's Misplaced Youth* and *Soldier, Sailor: Edgar Allan Poe and His Brother Henry*. Anne Whitehouse's poetry collections include *Blessings and Curses, The Refrain, Meteor Shower, Outside from the Inside,* and *Steady*. Her poetry chapbooks include *Surrealist Muse* (about Leonora Carrington), *Escaping Lee Miller, Frida, Being Ruth Asawa,* and *Adrienne Fidelin Restored.* She is the author of a novel, *Fall Love.*

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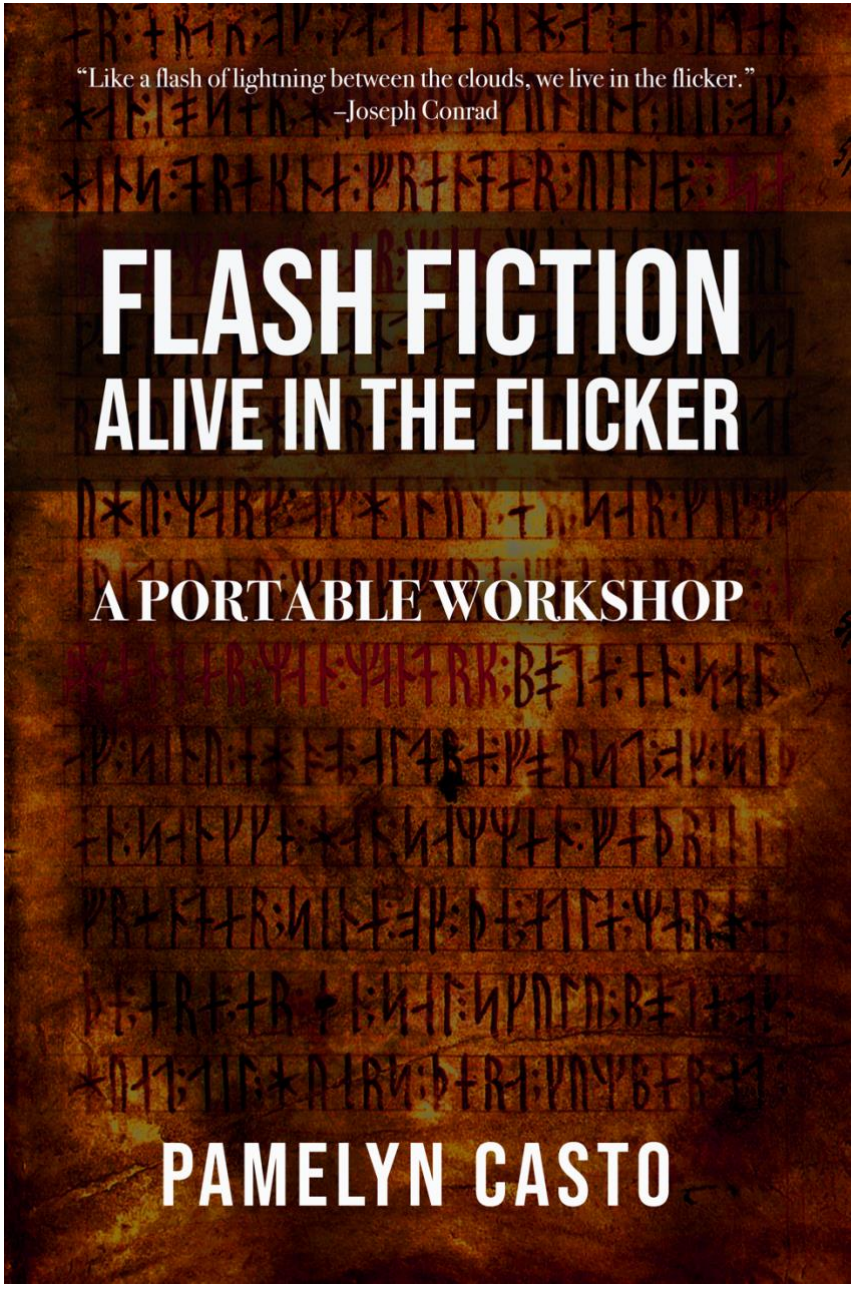

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