



EDGAR ALLAN POE

and the Spirit of the American Republic

Edgar Allan Poe's ‘Nemesis’ Stories

by Lewis Whilden

In looking at the great republican thinkers, you will find that they have all discovered that the universe is working for them, and that, ultimately, any violation of the principles of the universe leads to the violator's destruction. These thinkers figure out that this knowledge can be used as a political weapon, just as the LaRouche movement sees the universe as a political ally also. In fact, it is our fight from the heights of a higher-order manifold, that has instigated many axiomatic political changes in the last several years, including the recent moves in the Democratic Party towards thinking in the direction of FDR-style policies. But, woe to those in government who refuse to transform the axioms that are leading to our civilization's destruction. For, if you make policy by blowing cubed soap bubbles, the goddess Nemesis will be there with her pin, whether the bubbles form on George Bush's lip, are generated by George Shultz and Arnold Schwarzenegger in Alan Greenspan's bathtub, or take the form of the gigantic bubbles that make up the world economy.

Edgar Allan Poe is one of those republican thinkers who had a clear insight into this social principle of Nemesis. In a Detroit cadre school presentation about Poe,* Jeffrey Steinberg presented a challenge to the

LaRouche Youth Movement: Although there is a wealth of work to be done in terms of saving Poe from his slanders and unlocking who America's greatest writer really was historically, Jeff's suggested approach was to examine Poe's stories as a primary source of understanding how he thought. By getting to know Poe's mind, we can begin to refute the lies that creatures like the filthy Rufus Griswold have left in history's garbage bin.¹ The idea-content and illustrated principles within Poe's writings contradict Poe's image as a melancholic, opium-eating pederast. This article aims to give its readers an insight into how Poe thought, by examining only a few of the stories which (often humorously) illustrate how Poe understood the principle of Nemesis. So, take this article as one of many standpoints from which historical investigations of Edgar Allan Poe can now begin.

We will be looking at Poe at his best. In his stories, Poe is waging intensive political and psychological warfare operations for the souls of the Americans of his own time, as well as of ours. The three stories examined in this article are “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “William Wilson,” and “The Imp of the Perverse.” All three deal with madness, and exhibit Poe's courage in examining the darkness of the human mind: he takes you behind the face of evil. From Poe's stories, you can gain an insight into the LaRouche movement's method of doing intelli-

* See “The Purloined Life of Edgar Allan Poe,” page 45, this issue.

gence work, although Poe was not the inspiration for our intelligence method [SEE Box]. His work should be taken within the historically specific context of the Nineteenth- and early-Twentieth-century fights against British subversion of our Republic. In examining how creatures like Dick Cheney and the neo-conservatives think, LaRouche PAC's *Children of Satan* book² is Poe's intelligence method applied to the modern strategic situation, and in that sense, Poe's historic contribution to the destruction of the evil that is the Anglo-Dutch liberal system, a system Poe had dedicated his entire life to fighting. His work is an examination of the nature of creativity, and the psychological blocks that prevent you

from being creative. He is a mirror to, and preserver of your soul. It is therefore our patriotic duty to make Poe's thought once again a "living word" in the minds of all Americans!

The Nemesis/Ibykus Principle

At a youth cadre school after our 2005 Presidents' Day conference, I asked Helga Zeppe LaRouche to illustrate how Friedrich Schiller thought about Nemesis, and whether Nemesis was a scientifically provable social principle. She responded, that the recent tsunami disaster was a scientific proof of the principle. Let's look at this disas-

Lyndon LaRouche on Poe and Intelligence Methods

Although I had been immersed in the writings of Poe, together with Washington Irving, James F. Cooper, and so on during adolescence, my intelligence methods were not copied from Poe, but from my own adolescent studies in the principal philosophers of England, France, and Germany, from Sir Francis Bacon through Immanuel Kant, of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. I introduced Poe's work to our associates during the early 1970's, for the purpose providing our people a sense of U.S. domestic counter-intelligence from the period of Poe's principal work.

The intelligence methods which I introduced for the study of history more widely, were chiefly developed through the combination of my late 1940's studies of pre-Aristotelean Greek philosophy with my continuing warfare for Leibniz and against Kant, and my 1948-1953 discoveries in physical economy. What prompted me to employ these historical resources for intelligence/counterintelligence work was, chiefly, my experience in India during the first half of 1946, at a time when I gained a very clear perspective on the global conflict between U.S. patriotic and British imperial interests. In that perspective, Poe's importance is that he was, as a member of the Cincinnatus fraternity, employed in the role of a domestic counter-intelligence specialist working against British subversive operations inside the U.S.A., and an associate of James F. Cooper in such strategic ventures of that political-military intelligence organization.

Much of the work done on this significance of Poe was done by Allen Salisbury, whose work was influenced by association with Fred Wills.* It was during that period, of the middle 1970's, that I launched my personal intervention into the area of U.S. intelligence/counterintelligence commitments, where I first ran into conflict with George H.W. Bush. It was because of my continuing commitment to developing a fresh, history-based approach to a specifically U.S. approach to intelligence/counterintelligence functions of the U.S., that I worked with Allen and others in piecing together what became my project for establishing a U.S. intelligence academy paralleling the original intentions of West Point and Annapolis.

Some among us have exaggerated the importance of Poe, with disorienting effects, by identifying Poe as the source of our intelligence methods, which is contrary to fact. Poe's work was adopted as it figured in a very specific aspect of the early, pre-1949 defense of the U.S. against subversive cultural operations of the British Foreign Office.

The additional significance of our work in promoting a fresh view of Poe, during the late 1970's, was to attack the libelous injustice which Poe's so-called literary critics had done against a patriotic secret-intelligence agent of the U.S. services who deserved honest recognition by all U.S. patriots today.

—Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.,
May 11, 2005

* Allen Salisbury's "Edgar Allan Poe: The Lost Soul of America" appears on page 59 of this issue. Frederick Wills, who served as both

Justice and Foreign Minister of the nation of Guyana, was a founding Board Member of the Schiller Institute in the United States.

ter for a second: When it is a matter of policy to depopulate the planet, to create tourist economies run on slave labor in the countries of Asia, to willfully create the type of grinding poverty and lack of infrastructure that led to so many people dying unnecessarily, you are, as Helga said, “inviting a higher order to strike you down.” The intention behind creatures like George Shultz, and Kissinger’s NSSM-200 policy of Third World technological apartheid and strangulation, are violations of the principles behind LaRouche’s concept of *potential relative population-density*. If your aim is to bring the population below its present potential for growth despite the technologies available to us, then expect Nemesis to join you uninvited for dinner. The tsunami was a visitation of the goddess, forcefully reminding the world what the consequences of such anti-human behavior are.

However, to transcend the axioms of oligarchism that have kept humanity from reaching its full potential, one must turn to LaRouche’s conception of physical economy. Animals may exhaust an ecosystem and die off after they have reached their carrying capacity, but, despite the arguments from Malthusian population-control freaks and like genocidalists, mankind has no such fixed carrying capacity. Imagine the absurdity of someone from the past, from the days of wood burning, running around like a nut screaming, “We’re gonna run out of trees! We’re gonna run out of trees!” Compare such ravings to your modern environmentalists. The fact remains, that mankind discovered the heat-burning power of coal, which is greater than that of wood. Then, we moved to oil as an energy resource; then, nuclear fission; and now, potentially, fusion and matter/anti-matter reactions. With each of these leaps in energy technology, mankind’s carrying capacity has increased, and *potentially* greater numbers of people have been able to exist comfortably on our planet. Such is the beautiful result of the human mind’s ability to discover universal physical principles.

Now, imagine that you were to travel back in time to the Middle Ages, and tried to explain to the people you met, the process of splitting an atom. How long would it take them to declare you a witch and burn you alive? Reflect on what is possible in terms of technology, by thinking of those potentialities which the smartest men of our age could not possibly comprehend yet, as the relation of the medieval mind to nuclear power. If the LaRouche movement, representing a higher ordering, were to bring mankind into adulthood, crush oligarchism, and set economic policy in the direction of the development of each individual human being, increasing the density of discoveries in the process, then what becomes possible is a perpetual renaissance, a negentropic growth process similar to the logarithmic spiral. This is

the goal of our movement.

The tsunami disaster provided us with a window of opportunity to share the solution to such disasters, by putting the ideas of a New Bretton Woods monetary system back on the discussion table with added force. Such a discussion can prevent natural disasters from ever having such a catastrophic effect again. It is in this way that the universe has the potential to open our eyes, and give the Good an opportunity to bring mankind through the series of higher orderings required for our *successful survival* as a species.

Who is the goddess Nemesis, anyway? In Greek mythology, Nemesis was Zeus’s messenger of justice, goddess of divine retribution—in other words, Zeus’s enforcer. She was the daughter of Night, and sister of Eris, the hideous goddess of strife who rolled an apple into a party she was not invited to (that of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. The apple bore the inscription “to the most beautiful,” leading inevitably to Aphrodite rewarding Paris with Helen of Troy, and the start of the Trojan war.). Nemesis is in charge of establishing the decree that transfers souls from body to body. She deeply dislikes the absence of moderation, and is overly zealous to establish order and proportion, specifically through the punishment of excesses, pride, and undeserved happiness.

As is well known, Zeus was perhaps the horniest oligarch to ever exist. In his quest to have sex with the entire universe, he eventually developed a liking for Nemesis. When Zeus attempted this, Nemesis turned herself into a fish to attempt to escape him. Zeus and Nemesis transformed themselves into many animals in a rather humorous courtship. When Nemesis, otherwise known as Leda in the myth, turned herself into a goose, the lustful Zeus morphed into a swan, and the chase ended with Nemesis’s surrender. As a result, Nemesis would lay a golden egg. Out of this golden egg popped Helen of Troy (!), who would, with the help of Nemesis’s sister Eris, incite the Trojan War, a war that would then destroy a decadent civilization!

When thinking of the Nemesis principle, one could easily fall into the following trap: “Well, if the universe is on *our* side, and, as Leibniz says, we live in the best of all possible worlds, then won’t we win anyway, even if I don’t do anything to affect the outcome?” Consider the Trojan War as a warning against such sophistry. Or, look at the destruction of any civilization that adopts the axioms of empire, from the Romans, to the possible destruction of our own Republic. The universe will assert itself through Nemesis, but that does not mean that civilizations have to survive, in order for the universe to right what has been wronged. So, consider that line of thinking a *very* dangerous assumption. For example, it is very

possible that the population of this planet could sink below one billion. If we do not act as a movement, as a people, to adopt LaRouche's New Bretton Woods, the destruction of civilization may turn out to be the only way for the universe to right what has been wronged. It is up to us to act as agents of a higher ordering, and not let Nemesis have her way with the world.

In her response to my question, Helga went through Schiller's poem "The Cranes of Ibykus," as being the best example of how Schiller illustrates the Nemesis principle [SEE Box, page 84].³ It's this poem that gives the principle in question its second name, the "Ibykus Principle." The murderers of the poet Ibykus reveal themselves, as Schiller writes to Goethe, not because they have an impulse toward the good (for they are unprincipled killers), but because of, as Helga describes it, the "sublime, eerie presence" of the Erinyes, or Furies, on stage (the Erinyes in mythology being some of the many henchmen of the goddess Nemesis). This other-worldly presence exists "as if Divinity were immanent," i.e., a power that no degenerate of any kind could possibly ignore. Of course, the murderers reveal themselves; it is *necessary* that they reveal themselves. They cannot help themselves, in the face of the power of the universe and this principle.

Both Schiller and Edgar Allan Poe use the Nemesis principle as an artistic device to warn people that they cannot "trample on God's order," as Helga says. In both the poem, and in two of the Poe stories to be examined here, the subject is murder. Don't think that Poe or Schiller will let you get away with murder, not without divine retribution. If I may speak to Bush, Shultz, Cheney, Schwarzenegger, or any beastman who might be reading this: *That little sense of guilt in the back of your mind, that continual nagging that has the potential to reveal to you the wretchedness of your being, is that Nemesis talking to you, nagging you? Is it LaRouche? The universe, with the aid of the LaRouche Youth Movement, will ensure that you will never enjoy the "rewards" of your depravity, no matter how long you remain on this planet!*

Poe and Nemesis: The 'Tell-Tale Heart'

Let's now look at how Poe illustrates this principle. There are many Poe stories with the Nemesis theme, but we will cover three to make the point. All these stories are uniquely self-contained tragedies. There is a pattern that develops in each of them, which lies in the protagonist's relationship to the goddess: All the degenerates and murderers Poe writes about seem to be completely disconnected from the force, the very impulse towards the good within themselves. In fact, owing to their destructive axioms, the characters are often in complete denial

that the good exists within them at all. Nemesis arrives on the scene as a result of each individual's inability to break out of his mental prison by transforming the way he thinks. They are all in complete denial of the existence of their souls. Through these denials, Poe, using a touch of ironic ambiguity, shows us the existence of their souls, and also the absurdities of a soulless existence.

Take "The Tell-Tale Heart," for example. Most *Fidelio* readers are probably familiar with the story. It is usually our youthful classroom introduction to the "dark and melancholic" Poe. Many people have even heard Romantic recordings of the story inside their classrooms. The hokiness of this classroom experience is usually enough to turn people off Edgar Allan Poe for life.

If Poe is so dark, why doesn't he let his characters get away with murder? In "The Tell-Tale Heart," the very "nervous" narrator declares that the disease of madness had sharpened his senses (first hint that there is something wrong with his thinking!), especially his sense of hearing. He devises to kill the old man who is master of the house:

Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Frightened and enraged by the old man's vulture eye, he then shows an extreme amount of pride in detailing how meticulous he was in committing the crime, creeping into the old man's room several nights in a row, slowly opening his lantern so that a single beam of light shines in the old man's direction. Finally, on a night in which he was to prove his over-confidence, he startles the old man awake. He then hears a heartbeat that begins quickening, "a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton." He focusses his lantern on the old man's eye. Prompted by it to madness, he smothers the old man with the old man's bed.

After the murder, the protagonist seems overjoyed, continually reminding us of his meticulousness and genius. He cuts the old man into pieces and puts him under the floorboards of the room. The police then arrive upon reports of a shriek heard by neighbors. The murderer calmly invites them in, explaining that the old man was away, and that the scream was his own, awakening from a bad dream. He invites the police to sit with him in the old man's room, directly above where old man's remains are hidden. Suddenly, the murderer once again hears the heartbeat:



illustration to "The Tell-Tale Heart," by Alan Yue

It was a low, dull, quick sound—much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why *would* they not be gone? . . . I foamed—I raved—I swore! I swung the chair upon which I sat, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they *knew!*—they were making a mockery out of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But anything better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! *louder!*—

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

So the murderer gives himself away in a fit of paranoid insanity. There is a question, however, which should at this point be generated in the mind of the reader: Was the beating heart really the old man's? Could it have possibly been the narrator's own heart? Why has the narrator not even considered that the heartbeat could be his own? There is something acting here on the protagonist which seems beyond himself, like the forces conjured up by the Erinyes in "The Cranes of Ibykus." Why does the murderer give himself up? What force compels him to

do it? It's certainly nothing that the narrator can conceptualize within the framework of his own axioms. Was the narrator's confession the result of an evening visitation by the goddess? I would say that it was. The Nemesis principle is unseen in the story, yet Poe provokes us to consider and know its existence, and its operation on the narrator's actions.

'William Wilson'

Let me call myself for the present, William Wilson. The fair page in front of me need not be sullied by my real appellation. This has already been to much an object for the scorn—for the horror—for the detestation of my race? Men usually grow base by degrees. From me, in an instant, all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle. I shrouded my nakedness in triple guilt. From comparatively trivial wickedness I passed, with the stride of a giant, into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus [Heliogabalus]. What chance—what one event brought this evil thing to pass, bear with me while I relate. Death approaches; and the shadow which foreruns him has thrown a softening influence over my spirit. I long, in passing through the dim valley, for the sympathy—I had nearly said for the pity—of my fellow men. I would fain have them believe that I would have been, in some measure, the slave of circumstances beyond human control. I would wish them to seek out for me, in the details I am about to give, some little oasis of *fatality* amid a wilderness of error. I would have them allow—what they cannot refrain from allowing—that, although temptation may have erewhile existed as great, man was never *thus*, at least, tempted before—certainly

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

Right from the beginning, William Wilson is asking you to pity him and his fate. And, although as you learn more and more about him the idea of pitying Wilson becomes less and less appealing, it is from this standpoint that Wilson begins to tell you his wretched story.

He begins with very vivid descriptions of his childhood, eerily vivid. They seem to be his fondest and clearest memories. The descriptions are primarily of the

school in which his parents sent him to in his younger years. Wilson describes himself as a very willful, brilliant, and independent bully. He claims he had had “ascendancy over his schoolmates,” all accept one. Arriving at the school on the same day as himself was a boy who shared his very name, William Wilson. This second Wilson not only shared his name, but also looked very much like him, had the same general mannerisms, walked like him, even spoke like him, although he would only speak in a whisper. Wilson #1 would also discover that Wilson #2 was not only his age, but was born on the same day.

The relationship the two Wilsons develop becomes quite complex. It's worth quoting Poe at length:

Nemesis and Schiller's 'Cranes of Ibykus'

I think the way Schiller treats 'Nemesis,' and he studied it in actually all the great tragedians of Classical Greece, is as the idea that, if you put guilt on yourself, you invite a higher lawfulness to strike you down. You cannot violate the order of creation without that happening. Sooner or later—it's not like an instantaneous response, but sooner or later, it comes. Civilizations which have violated the order of creation over longer periods of time, bring *doom* about them. Which is why, if we don't correct the present situation, the idea of mankind shrinking to half a billion people, is an imminent, visible possibility one can see on the horizon. Why? Because we are violating the laws of the universe, in the present political order.

Schiller worked on this again and again, but I think the most beautiful, coherent, powerful way is his poem "The Cranes of Ibykus." Here, basically, he has the murder of the poet Ibykus. The cranes fly over, and Ibykus says, "If there is no one else to avenge my murder, I call upon you cranes to be my vengeance." Later, all the poets gather at a contest of poets and rhapsodes, and a chorus of the Erinyes (Furies) enters. And, what Schiller does there is unbelievable! You will hear—I don't know if it works in English the same way, but if you read this in German, the way the rhythm, the power of the idea, that these goddesses, who do not look human, are walking in a certain way, and the rhythm of the poem, conjures up powers that are not of this world. Just by the way Schiller writes it, the wording and the rhymes, there's no way you cannot read it differently from all the rest. Because, it has a certain *drama* to it. And then, when these Erinyes say, "We will haunt the guilty, until he falls! Even if he

goes to the next world, we will not stop there! We will catch him and bring about his downfall!" There is this unbelievable "eerie," when the poem says, "Als ob die Gottheit nahe wär" ["As if the Godhead were nearby"]. So, something eerie is established. And then, eventually, the Erinyes go away. The whole theatre is full of people, full of poets, full of singers, and then all of a sudden the cranes fly over the stage. And then the murderers, it slips out of their mouths, and they exclaim, "Sieh da! Sieh da, Timotheus! Die Kraniche des Ibykus!" ["See there! See there, Timotheus! Behold the cranes of Ibykus!"].

In the letters between Goethe and Schiller, Schiller actually says that the murderers do not reveal themselves because they feel guilty, since they are such evil killers that they don't feel guilt. They don't have this conscience. They reveal themselves because of the earlier appearance of the Erinyes, because something totally *sublime*, something totally "eerie," has been established. And, therefore, they lose control and give the secret away. And they are immediately seized and thrown before a tribunal, and are tried. This is *Nemesis* striking down—they have to reveal themselves, they cannot help it. Whenever you commit a crime, it's not an instantaneous thing. It's not that you steal something, and then your punishment comes immediately. But you become involved, entangled in a tragic condition, and *eventually this higher justice* means you cannot enjoy the fruits of your evil.

—Helga Zepp LaRouche,
reply to cadre school question,
February 2005

Wilson's rebellion was to me a source of the greatest embarrassment—the more so as, in spite of the bravado with which in public I made a point of treating him and his pretensions, I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority, since not to be overcome cost me a perpetual struggle. Yet this superiority—even this equality—was in truth acknowledged by no one but myself; our associates, by some unaccountable blindness, seemed not even to suspect it. Indeed, his competition, his resistance, and especially his impudent and dogged interference with my purposes, were not more pointed than private. He appeared to be utterly destitute alike of the ambition which urged, and of the passionate energy of mind which enabled me to excel. In his rivalry he might have been supposed actuated solely by a whimsical desire to thwart, astonish, or mortify myself; although there were times when I could not help observing, with a feeling made up of wonder, abasement, and pique, that he mingled with his injuries, his insults, or his contradictions, a certain most inappropriate, and assuredly most unwelcome *affectionateness* of manner. I could only conceive this singular behavior to arise from a consummate self-conceit assuming the vulgar airs of patronage and protection. . . .

It is difficult, indeed, to define, or even to describe, my real feelings towards him. They were formed of a heterogeneous mixture—some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity. To the moralist fully acquainted with the minute springs of human action, it will be unnecessary to say, in addition, that Wilson and myself were the most inseparable of companions.

Wilson #1 would continue to play terrible pranks on his *doppelgänger*, but he also admits that this second Wilson seemed to have a keener moral insight than himself. In his “vulgar airs of patronage and protection,” Wilson #2 would often provide advice, infuriating Wilson #1, although the narrator admits that if he had followed the advice of his double, he might have led a much happier life.

One night, Wilson #1 decides to pull a nasty prank while Wilson #2 is sleeping. But, as he approaches his double’s bedside, his observations begin to frighten and disturb him. His double is *sleeping* like him. The closer he holds the lantern to his sleeping face, the more he sees the resemblance to himself:

Not thus he appeared—assuredly not *thus*—in the vivacity of his waking hours. The same name! the same contour of person! The same day of arrival at the academy! And this dogged imitation of my gait, my voice, my habits, and my manner! Was it, in truth, within the bounds of human possibility, that *what I now witnessed* was the result of the habitual practice of this sarcastic imitation?

Wilson #1 extinguishes his lantern and runs out of the

school in terror, never to return.

Wilson #1 then describes his experiences attending Eton: taking part in all sorts of youthful depravities, drinking with the most disaffected of his schoolmates, etc. During one of these drinking binges, as the light of dawn starts to hit the windows and Wilson raises “a toast of more than intolerable profanity,” he is told by a servant that he has a visitor. Drunkenly scrambling out of the room, he sees a figure of his own height, dressed exactly like himself. This person hurries up to him, grabs his arm, then whispers “William Wilson” into his ear. “I grew perfectly sober in an instant,” Wilson narrates, thoroughly disturbed by the memories Wilson #2 brings forth in himself. The second Wilson leaves as suddenly as he appears.

The narrator then finds himself at Oxford, where, not being from a rich family himself, he strives to loot the children of the English oligarchy through gambling, a practice at which he has become quite cunning and devious. Wilson admits that his own personal depravities had a tendency to increase exponentially during this period. He targets for looting a new, very rich student named Glendinning, whom he already perceives as having a weak character. He begins playing cards with him nightly, letting him win often. One carefully chosen night, he decides to play out his evil intention, invites many people to his chambers, and ensures that it is Glendinning himself who brings up the idea of playing cards. From here, as they continue to drink heavily, Wilson begins to bankrupt Glendinning, enraging him as the alcohol continues to flow.

At the pitiable nadir of this process, the doors swing open and a breeze extinguishes the candles. In the darkness a figure appears dressed in the same style cloak as that which Wilson #1 wore to the gathering, and then whispers:

“Gentlemen, I make no apology for this behavior, because, in thus behaving, I am but fulfilling a duty. You are, beyond doubt, uninformed of the true character of the person who has tonight won at *écarté* a large sum of money from Lord Glendinning. I will therefore put you upon an expeditious and decisive plan of obtaining this very necessary information. Please to examine, at your leisure, the inner linings of the cuff of his left sleeve, and the several little packages which may be found in the capacious pockets of his embroidered morning wrapper.”

When Wilson’s companions search him, they find the cards hidden up his sleeve. He is eventually kicked out of Oxford, and heads to the Continent to embark on a life of crime. At this point, the narrative picks up, with Wilson #2 thwarting the schemes of Wilson #1 every step of the way:



illustration to "William Wilson," by Alan Yue

I fled in vain. My evil destiny pursued me as if in exultation, and proved, indeed, that the exercise of its mysterious dominion had as yet only begun. Scarcely had I set foot in Paris ere I had fresh evidence of the detestable interest taken by this Wilson in my concerns. Years flew, while I experienced no relief. Villain!—at Rome, with how untimely, yet with how spectral an officiousness, stepped he in between me and my ambition! At Vienna, too, at Berlin, and at Moscow! Where, in truth, had I not bitter cause to curse him within my heart? From his inscrutable tyranny did I at length flee, panic-stricken, as from a pestilence; and to the very ends of the earth *I fled in vain.*

And again, and again, in secret communion with my own spirit, would I demand the questions "Who is he?—whence came he?—and what are his objects?" But no answer was there found. And now I scrutinized, with a minute scrutiny, the forms, and the methods, and the leading traits of his impudent supervision. But even here there was very little upon which to base a conjecture. It was noticeable, indeed, that, in no one of the multiplied instances in which he had of late crossed my path, had he so crossed it except to frustrate those schemes, or to disturb those actions, which, fully carried out, might have resulted in bitter mischief. Poor justification this, in truth, for an authority so imperiously assumed! Poor indemnity for natural rights of self-agency so pertinaciously, so insultingly denied!

While in Milan, the narrator attends a decadent masked ball given by a rich duke. Wilson admits that by this point he had routinely given himself up completely to wine, and had the goal at this gathering to seduce his

host's wife. Before the party, she had told him what costume she would be wearing. He spots her from across the room and creeps toward her with a lustful look in his eye. Suddenly, a hand seizes him by the shoulders. He turns around and sees a man of his height, dressed in the exact same executioner's costume with black hood.

Enraged, Wilson grabs his double and flings him into a nearby room. He had earlier resolved to do something horrific to Wilson #2, if he ever saw him again. They draw their swords. The drunken Wilson #1 stabs Wilson #2 repeatedly, with an indescribable fury. Amidst the commotion, someone tries to enter the room. Wilson prevents the intrusion, turns back around, and observes:

At this instant some person tried the latch of the door. I hastened to prevent an intrusion, and then immediately returned to my dying antagonist. But what human language can adequately portray *that* astonishment, *that* horror which possessed me at the spectacle then presented to view. The brief moment in which I averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce, apparently, a material change in the arrangements at the upper or farther end of the room. A large mirror, it appeared to me, now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced, with a feeble and tottering gait, to meet me.

Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist—it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution. Not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of that face which was not, even identical-

ly, mine own! His mask and cloak lay where he had thrown them, upon the floor.

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 own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself."

Wilson #1 and Wilson #2 turn out to be one man, as some of you may have guessed. It is worth noting how dramatic Wilson's disconnect from his conscience is. Here, the force assumed to be external, Wilson's conscience, compels him toward good; he has in fact created for himself an imaginary figure who represents the good impulses within himself. Wilson #2, being on the outside, thus absolves Wilson #1 from taking any responsibility for his actions. His inability to conceptualize the idea that he may be both Wilsons is the root of his madness, and is what makes the story a tragedy. Ultimately, Wilson's suicide, or self-murder, occurs as the outcome toward the greatest good, because Wilson is incapable of transforming himself. It is Wilson's refusal to break free of his horrific axioms and make a conceptual leap concerning his identity, which inspires Nemesis to act.⁴

'The Imp of the Perverse'

In "The Imp of the Perverse," the narrator calls the Nemesis principle by a misnomer: perverseness. He defines perverseness as an unconscious, irrational force that compels a man to destroy himself.

Consider the following axiom:

If we cannot comprehend God in his visible works, how then in his conceivable thoughts, that call the works into being? If we cannot understand him in his objective creatures, how then in his substantive moods and phases of creation?

Right at the beginning of this story, Poe reveals to us the flaws in the narrator's thinking, setting the conditions for an astute mind (one which has perhaps studied Kepler and Gauss) to discover the false axioms that govern what follows. The narrator, in the quote, is denying the existence of intention, and higher intentions governing seemingly contradictory human behavior, i.e., physical phenomena. Working from the ground up, he then tries to define what he calls perverseness by the nasty logic of induction:

Induction, *a posteriori*, would have brought phrenology to admit, as an innate and primitive principle of human action, a paradoxical something, which we may call *perverseness*, for want of a more characteristic term. In the

sense I intend, it is, in fact, a *mobile* without motive, a motive not *motivirt* [motivated]. Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should *not*. In theory, no reason can be more unreasonable, but, in fact, there is none more strong. With certain minds, under certain conditions, it becomes absolutely irresistible. I am not more certain that I breathe, than that the assurance of the wrong or error of any action is often the one unconquerable *force* which impels us, and alone impels us to its prosecution. Nor will this overwhelming tendency to do wrong for the wrong's sake, admit of analysis, or resolution into ulterior elements. It is a radical, a primitive impulse—elementary.

From this "pro-Ptolemy/anti-Kepler" standpoint, the narrator then presents a few examples of the perverse, one of which is notable, and could very well confuse modern readers into reinforcing the deeply planted notion that Poe is a melancholic, existentialist whateverist:

We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnameable feeling. By gradations, still more imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape, as did the vapor from the bottle out of which arose the genius [genie] in the Arabian Nights. But out of this our cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius or any demon of a tale, and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height. And this fall—this rushing annihilation—for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination—for this very cause do we now the most vividly desire it. And because our reason violently deter us from the brink, *therefore* do we the most impetuously approach it. There is no passion in nature so demoniacally impatient, as that of him who, shuddering upon the edge of a precipice, thus meditates a Plunge. To indulge, for a moment, in any attempt at *thought*, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and *therefore* it is, I say, that we *cannot*. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.

At this point, the unastute reader may be fooled into thinking that perverseness exists as the idea is being conveyed by the narrator. It may seem quite plausible. If you think this, you've fallen into Poe's cleverly woven trap

(though at this point we know nothing of the narrator's situation)! The story shifts gears as the narrator describes his predicament:

I have said thus much, that in some measure I may answer your question—that I may explain to you why I am here—that I may assign to you something that shall have at least the faint aspect of a cause for my wearing these fetters, and for my tenanting this cell of the condemned. Had I not been thus prolix, you might either have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble, have fancied me mad. As it is, you will easily perceive that I am one of the many uncounted victims of the Imp of the Perverse.

The narrator (who strangely sees himself as a victim) committed what he thought was the perfect murder, killing an old man with an untraceable poison candle, and then inheriting his estate and living in luxury. The verdict of the police was "Death by the visitation of God." The narrator, extremely satisfied with himself, revels in the perfection of his crime and the "absolute security" he feels about the fact that he will never be caught.

But, on occasion, a "haunting and harassing thought" crossed his mind, one that annoyed him as if he had a song stuck in his head. He often caught himself saying under his breath "I am safe—I am safe."

In one instance, while walking down the street, this feeling strikes him like a thunderbolt, with renewed vigor. He finds himself saying the words "I am safe—I am safe—yes, if I do not prove fool enough to make open confession." This thought will be the beginning of his downfall, for it becomes an obsession, which then transforms him to act upon it!

At first, I made strong effort to shake off this nightmare of the soul. I whistled—I laughed aloud—I walked vigorously—faster and still faster. At length I saw—or fancied that I saw—a vast and formless shadow that seemed to dog my footsteps, approaching me from behind, with a cat-like and stealthy pace. It was then that I ran. I felt a wild desire to shriek aloud. Every succeeding wave of thought overwhelmed me with new terror, for alas! I understood too well that to *think*, in my condition, was to be undone. I still quickened my steps. I bounded like a madman through the crowded thoroughfares. But now, the populace took alarm, and pursued. Then—then I felt the consummation of my fate. Could I have torn out my tongue, I would have done it—but a rough voice from some member of the crowd now resounded in my ears, and a rougher grasp seized me by the arm. I turned—I gasped for breath. For a moment, I experienced all the pangs of suffocation; I became blind, and deaf, and giddy; and at this instant, it was no mortal hand, I knew, that struck me with a broad and massive

palm upon the back. At that blow the long-imprisoned secret burst forth from my soul.

So, as a consequence of his confession, the narrator is sentenced to death. This is a beautiful example of Poe's sense of humor. The story is dense with ironies: The very principles the narrator denies, labeling them an irrational impulse toward perverseness, act as the force leading to his self-destruction. Once again, as in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "William Wilson," the narrator is blinded by his axioms, and so cannot recognize the higher ordering acting upon him. The guy just simply confesses! We've all heard stories about people who commit crimes, and then out of guilt turn themselves in. Usually these people recognize why they did so. This narrator cannot recognize the guilt within himself, nor does he recognize that he has the potential for the good. Such is the consequence Poe illustrates repeatedly in his stories, of refusing to break out of one's axiomatic assumptions.

In each of these examples, the narrator externalizes the force within himself that is compelling him to his own destruction—whether that force appears as a heartbeat, an imaginary *doppelgänger*, or an evil little imp whacking the unsuspecting on the back, so that the guilty spew forth their secrets. A force, conjured by the Erinyes, acts upon the narrator of each story, even though each refuses to acknowledge the possibility of its existence, or its existence within themselves. It is their failure to break free of their axiomatic assumptions that destroys them, and prevents their salvation. The Nemesis principle, a higher ordering, is unseen, yet the idea is nonetheless conveyed by these ironies. Delivering such a thought object, and such a warning, is the purpose of these stories.⁵

Immortality, or, How To Convince Nemesis To Stay Home

Reflect on all the silly movies you have watched that romanticize really sick individuals as "anti-heroes." Think of *A Clockwork Orange*, where director Stanley Kubrick invites you to revel in the depravities of his protagonist, while conditioning the mind to associate Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with violence and masturbation. There are many films like this: *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*; *Training Day*; *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer*; *Man Bites Dog*; etc. With most modern films, audiences walk out of the theater liking the villains more than the heroes (which also tells you something about our population). Why is it, then, that, if Poe were so pederastically melancholic, he never lets the bad guys win? Perhaps it is

because he only ever chooses one good guy: the universe, as he understands it through the eyes of Johannes Kepler, Plato, and others. Academia might be tempted to call these stories, and others like them, Poe's "madman stories." I prefer to call them Poe's "Nemesis stories."

But Poe does not discount human intervention into the process of creation. Reflect on his "The Purloined Letter." The investigator Dupin serves as an agent of a higher ordering, setting in motion the political destruction of a devious Minister who is using a stolen letter to blackmail the French government. By getting to know the mind of the Minister (an evil genius, Paul Wolfowitz type), while decrying the mathematical, linear thinking of the chief of police in his endless searches within the Cartesian grid of the Minister's apartments, Dupin uses a higher form of reasoning—poetic reasoning, a reasoned assessment of intention—to ensure that the French government does not fall under the Minister's control. This, of course, is the role the LaRouche Youth Movement plays as representative of a higher-order manifold, preventing our government from going fascist, and consistently presenting the solution to the current global crisis. We should cue off Poe in this regard.

Consider all the effort put into Hitler's Holocaust, post-war utopianism, Third World coups, the I.M.F., the Iraq War, etc. Reflect on their inefficiencies as events and concepts. Now, compare this to Gottfried Leibniz, an individual whose discovery of the principle of least action is responsible for much of the technology we have today. Leibniz, as a physical economist, was the first to talk about the capability of a heat-powered machine to allow one man to do the work of a hundred, a functional relationship within technology that LaRouche calls energy-flux density. Think also of Leibniz's concept of the "pursuit of happiness" in our Declaration of Independence. It was Leibniz's ideas that led to the great Republican experiment of America, the one government that has the potential to free mankind from the concept of oligarchy and perpetuate a renaissance on this planet. Within our Constitution, the potential exists to create the type of negentropic economic process that would transform all of humanity, encouraging the human being's innate ability to create and discover, to manifest itself increasingly in reality. We must thank Leibniz for this.

Yes, Hitler and the Synarchists' efforts resulted in the deaths of millions of people. But the result of Leibniz's life was to set the conditions for billions of potential geniuses to be born; his ideas are in fact directly responsible for the birth of billions. Similarly, it was Jesus Christ whose sacrifices led to the destruction of the Roman Empire. It was Joan of Arc whose execution led to the

creation of the first modern nation-state. It has always been *individuals* who take sovereign responsibility to change history, and who increase the potential relative population-density of this planet. Let our movement be the higher ordering that brings discovered principles into reality, through LaRouche's New Bretton Woods. Let us be the discoverers of these principles. For, by understanding our power as historical individuals, and as a movement, we can surely internalize the idea of being active parts of a higher-order manifold, whose actions and ideas are dominating the discourse in the Noosphere of every major capital city on this planet. Poe would be proud, as he represented this kind of higher ordering in his own lifetime.

Forget your doubts—they're irrelevant! "I'm . . . not really that confident about being a part of a higher ordering. . . . Being an agent of the Noosphere, I really don't have confidence that I can influence and change the biosphere. . . . I think I want to . . . just . . . stay in school, and remain . . . a part of the . . . biosphere." What silliness! The current situation is such that, if we choose not to take up this responsibility, transforming our own axioms in the process, Nemesis will strike us all down and destroy our civilization. We must not let this happen. Let us take to heart the warning that Poe gives us in his Nemesis stories. We can win this fight, if we are confident in our status as a higher ordering, deployed by the universe to be agents of historical change toward a perpetual renaissance. Our ideas will continue to dominate the Noosphere.

We must tell Nemesis to stay home! Happily, and perhaps to the surprise of some people in our movement, she will willingly do so!

1. On Griswold, see Jeffrey Steinberg, "The Purloined Life of Edgar Allan Poe," page 45, this issue.
2. *Children of Satan* (Leesburg, Virginia: Lyndon LaRouche PAC, 2004).
3. For an English translation of Friedrich Schiller's "The Cranes of Ibykus," see www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/trans_schil_3poems.html.
4. A good possible project would be to investigate whether or not "William Wilson" may have been inspired by an actual historical person, perhaps a Venetian-agent type like Casanova, travelling around Europe causing trouble for both individuals and governments.
5. "The Imp of the Perverse" also illustrates the essential paradox of Poe's life. From the description of a man willingly jumping off a cliff in order to feel what it's like to die in such a way, one could easily infer that the slanders about his life are perhaps true, and that the protagonist is nothing but a self-portrait of the "existentialist" Poe. The irony at the heart of the story gives you a glimpse of how Poe's mind really works, however, betraying a different view of man than what's popularly believed about Poe. Therein lies the paradox, and thus should begin your own investigations into Poe's history.