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 child-
hood, eerily vivid. They seem to be his fondest and clear-
est 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 “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 Class-
cial 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 with-
out 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 can-
not 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 “eeriness,” 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
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. When-
ever 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 eventu-
ally this higher justice means you cannot enjoy the
fruits of your evil.

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