



THINK TWICE

by Lisa Scottoline

In Her Own Words

- “Thinking Twice About *Think Twice*”
An Original Essay by Lisa Scottoline

Beyond the Book

- *A special extra!*
Excerpts from “William Wilson”
by Edgar Allan Poe

Keep on Reading

- Ideas for Book Groups
- Reading Group Questions

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Thinking Twice About Think Twice

An Original Essay by the Author

On its surface, *Think Twice* is the story of an evil twin who takes over the life of a good twin, and the question is whether the good or evil twin will survive.

But that's only the surface.

And appearances can be deceiving.

Those of you who are in book clubs like to dig deeper, and I appreciate your reading me, so I'll take this opportunity to break the wall between us and tell you frankly what inspired this novel, because to me, the surface is only part of what's going on in *Think Twice*.

But first, some background.

Where did I get the idea for *Think Twice*?

Believe it or not, I got the original inspiration from my own life—a decade or so ago, when I learned I had a half sister. I didn't learn of her existence until I was an adult, and she was a daughter of my father's, who was put up for adoption at birth. Happily, she had a wonderful adoptive experience, but after the passing of her adoptive father, she came to find her birth father, a difficult journey for her, and one which I honor, so much. But it was difficult for me, too, because when she surfaced, my experience was profoundly odd. I thought I was the only daughter, but I wasn't. I thought I was the oldest daughter, but I wasn't. It reconfigured my family, and confused and bewildered me, for a time.

I felt found, when I didn't know I'd been lost.

And so, a lifelong experiment in nature verses nurture began, in my mind.

But let's be clear. My half sister is a wonderful person, and not the evil twin herein. On the contrary, she's really the good twin. She looks uncannily like me, down to the blue eyes we both got from our father, and I've come to know and love her. But I knew I'd have to write about my feelings, in a way.



You can't have this job and ignore an event like that, or you forfeit your laptop.

Though *Think Twice* stands alone, it is, in fact, the third of three novels that I began after I met my half sister. The first was *Mistaken Identity* and the second *Dead Ringer*, which together introduce Alice and her increasingly homicidal actions. And, yes, I always use my real emotions to inform my novels. All fiction writers aspire to write the truth, as paradoxical as that may sound. As Francis Ford Coppola says, "Nothing in my movies happened, but everything is true." And the psychological journey that Bennie Rosato takes over the arc of these three novels was informed by my own feelings and gives *Think Twice* its emotional truth and power.

Especially because I believe that characterization is the most important part of any novel, what better way to delve deeply into character than through the trope of a good and evil twin? To me, what's really happening in *Think Twice* is that after Alice does all those terrible things to Bennie, Bennie finds that evil that lurks inside her own heart. And the real question in the novel is not will Bennie survive her twin, but will Bennie survive herself? Can she overcome the darker impulses for revenge and even murder that are stirred up, or maybe instigated, by Alice and her misconduct? Can Bennie get herself back, after she strays so far across the line between good and evil?

The English majors among you—and I know you are there, God bless you—will know that any good-and-evil-twin story inherits a long, rich literary tradition, which even has roots in modern psychology. To be specific, I was thinking of Edgar Allan Poe and his story "William Wilson" when I first found out about my half sister and began to write about Bennie and Alice. If you haven't read Poe's stories, you should, and the one that haunted me was "William Wilson," and you'll see how it feeds into *Think Twice*.

Read on, as Poe would say.

*In Her
Own Words*

“William Wilson” is the story of a schoolboy, and at the very outset, his identity is uncertain. In fact, Poe starts the story, “Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation.”

Think “Call me Ishmael,” but more intriguing.

Poe reportedly had an obsession with the color white, but we won’t go into the parallels between him and Melville here. Suffice it to say that what happens in “William Wilson” is as epic a battle as with any white whale, but in Poe’s story, the nemesis is the hero himself.

In the story, William Wilson meets a classmate who looks exactly like him. The other boy has the same name and even the same birthday. (Actually, William specifies that their shared birthday is “the nineteenth of January,” which is Poe’s own birthday.) He’s the same height, too. They even enter the school on the same day, “by mere accident.” The only difference between them is that the other boy has some defect in his throat that prevents him from raising his voice “above a very low whisper.” Bottom line, the other boy is the double, or twin, of William Wilson.

The boys start out as uneasy friends, then the double does everything to make himself more like William Wilson, except that he can’t copy his voice completely. William says, “His cue, which was to perfect an imitation of myself, lay both in words and in actions; and most admirably did he play his part. My dress it was an easy matter to copy; my gait and general manner were, without difficulty, appropriated; in spite of his constitutional defect, even my voice did not escape him. My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, it was identical; and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.”

And interestingly, instead of the main character being the good one and the double being the bad one, in “William Wilson,” the narrator is the bad one, and the double is the good one. It’s so much more interesting, and bolder. Imagine Goofus and Gallant, with Goofus



as the storyteller. Isn't he more fun to listen to than the goody-goody Gallant? Patricia Highsmith, the author of the Ripley series, and Jeff Lindsay, in the Dexter series, would make the same wise choice, though the first writer to do so may have been John Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, wasn't Satan more interesting than you-know-who?

But to stay on point, in William Wilson, the title character is witty, naughty, and an effete bully. He drinks too much, uses profanity, and cheats at cards. His double is nicer, kinder, and more considerate in every respect. In time, William Wilson comes to dislike, then hate his double. He leaves school to get away from him, then time passes and he goes to Eton, where one day, he invites "a small part of the most dissolute students" to his room for "a secret carousal." *Bam!* In walks his double, to spoil the fun. William Wilson says, "I grew perfectly sober in an instant."

The double is the buzzkill of the century.

William flees to Paris, his thoughts haunted by his doppelganger. He says, "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." At war with itself, William's psyche begins to disintegrate. He generates into chronic gambling, drinking, and further debauchery until we see him at another card game, with an aristocratic "dupe" he plies with liquor, to cheat him more easily. Suddenly, the double reappears and blows William's cover, exposing his hidden cards when he says: "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 somewhat capacious pockets of his embroidered morning wrapper."

Busted.

William hurries to Rome, decompensating further, and during a ball at Carnival, his lecherous eye falls upon the beautiful wife of a duke. Out of the blue, the double appears, this time masked and caped, to thwart our hero's

*In Her
Own Words*

misdeed. The two fall into a swordfight, and. . . .

Well, I can't give away the surprise ending. But you can read excerpts from the story following this essay.

So why do I think this story is so great, and how does it speak to me and inform *Think Twice*? I think it's in the pull of its terrific premise, the doubling between William Wilson and his look-alike. While it's unclear whether William and his double are two halves of the same whole, or two separate people, the dramatic effect is the same. His fragmented or broken identity terrifies us at a profound level, and when it's the protagonist who's having an identity crisis, we're placed squarely in his very shaky shoes. So it's impossible to read "William Wilson" and not identify with William, feeling his anguish and his evil, both at once.

And the threat is so much greater when it comes from within, as in this story of psychological horror, than from without, as in a conventional ghost story. Poe knew that no monster is half as scary as the evil within us, and it's tempting to wonder if he "wrote what he knew," considering his own personal unhappiness and the fact that he assigned William Wilson his own birthday. Read that way, the story is poignant indeed.

Plus, Poe may not have invented the evil twin, but he certainly anticipated it, as well as exploiting the spookiness that comes from the fragmenting or doubling of the self, and the splintering of identity. Sigmund Freud would later explain its psychology in his seminal essays *The Uncanny*, written in 1919, but there's no doubt that the concept gives "William Wilson" its dramatic impact.

And the hold that doubling has on our collective psyche is underlined by its more recent examples in popular culture, from benign sitcoms like *The Patty Duke Show* to the comic book conflict of Superman and his evil flip side, Venom. Think, too, of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where the man looks like your husband but he's not your husband. Or vice versa, in *The Stepford Wives*, when the terrified wife stumbles upon her own replica.



Robert Ludlum's Jason Bourne novels trade on the doubling concept, when our hero flashes back on a self he doesn't know, remember, or even recognize. Bourne's confusion about his own identity, and whether he is fundamentally good or evil echoes "William Wilson." And there's even a hint of identity duality, or a split self, in Stephen King's classic, *The Shining*, in which a frustrated writer takes a job as a hotel caretaker, loses his mind, and tries to kill his family. Not only is the caretaker a double of a previous caretaker, who had followed the same deranged path, but we see how easily good dad crosses the median to become evil dad, when a hotel and a blank page drive him crazy.

The blank page, I know well.

And the interesting thing is that, as an author, I've learned that the page is never really blank. The blank page is full of an author's life, experience, and even surprise sisters. It's all there, even before I sit down to write.

After you've read *Think Twice*, do take a second to see if you can find the similarities between my personal story, "William Wilson," and the novel. They're there.

Lurking.

And thanks again, for taking the time to read me.

I am honored, and very grateful.

*In Her
Own Words*



William Wilson

Excerpts from “William Wilson”

By Edgar Allan Poe

First published in 1839

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

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



And am I not now dying a victim to the horror and the mystery of the wildest of all sublunary visions?

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

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In truth, the ardor, the enthusiasm, and the imperiousness of my disposition, soon rendered me a marked character among my schoolmates, and by slow, but natural gradations, gave me an ascendancy over all not greatly older than myself;—over all with a single exception. This exception was found in the person of a scholar, who, although no relation, bore the same Christian and surname as myself;—a circumstance, in fact, little remarkable; for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of those everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob. In this narrative I have therefore designated myself as William Wilson,—a fictitious title not very dissimilar to the real. My namesake alone, of those who in school phraseology constituted “our set,” presumed to compete with me in the studies of the class—in the sports and broils of the

Beyond the Book

play-ground—to refuse implicit belief in my assertions, and submission to my will—indeed, to interfere with my arbitrary dictation in any respect whatsoever. If there is on earth a supreme and unqualified despotism, it is the despotism of a master mind in boyhood over the less energetic spirits of its companions.

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

Perhaps it was this latter trait in Wilson's conduct, conjoined with our identity of name, and the mere accident of our having entered the school upon the same day, which set afloat the notion that we were brothers, among the senior classes in the academy. These do not usually inquire with much strictness into the affairs of their juniors. I have before said, or should have said, that Wilson was not, in the most remote degree, con-



nected with my family. But assuredly if we had been brothers we must have been twins; for, after leaving Dr. Bransby's, I casually learned that my namesake was born on the nineteenth of January, 1813—and this is a somewhat remarkable coincidence; for the day is precisely that of my own nativity.

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

It was no doubt the anomalous state of affairs existing between us, which turned all my attacks upon him, (and they were many, either open or covert) into the channel of banter or practical joke (giving pain while assuming the aspect of mere fun) rather than into a more serious and determined hostility. But my endeavours on this head were by no means uniformly successful, even when my plans were the most wittily concocted; for my namesake had much about him, in character, of that unassuming and quiet austerity which, while enjoying the poignancy of its own jokes, has no heel of Achilles in itself, and absolutely refuses to be laughed at. I could find, indeed, but one vulnerable point, and that, lying in a personal peculiarity, arising, perhaps, from

Beyond the Book

constitutional disease, would have been spared by any antagonist less at his wit's end than myself;—my rival had a weakness in the faucal or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time above a very low whisper. Of this defect I did not fail to take what poor advantage lay in my power.

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



Ideas for Book Groups

I am a huge fan of book clubs because it means people are reading and discussing books. Mix that with wine and carbs, and you can't keep me away. I'm deeply grateful to all who read me, and especially honored when my book is chosen by a book club. I wanted an opportunity to say thank you to those who read me, which gave me the idea of a contest. Every year I hold a book club contest and the winning book club gets a visit from me and a night of fabulous food and good wine. To enter is easy: all you have to do is take a picture of your entire book club with each member holding a copy of my newest hardcover and send it to me by mail or e-mail. No book club is too small or too big. Don't belong to a book club? Start one. Just grab a loved one, a neighbor or friend, and send in your picture of you each holding my newest book. I look forward to coming to your town and wining and dining your group. For more details, just go to www.scottoline.com.

Tour time is my favorite time of year because I get to break out my fancy clothes and meet with interesting and fun readers around the country. The rest of the year I am a homebody, writing every day, but thrilled to be able to connect with readers through e-mail. I read all my e-mail, and answer as much as I can. So, drop me a line about books, families, pets, love, or whatever is on your mind at lisa@scottoline.com. For my latest book and tour information, special promotions, and updates you can sign up at www.scottoline.com for my newsletter.

Lisa Scottoline

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The Wednesday Evening Ladies' Literary Guild of Mineola, N.Y., submit their photo for Lisa's book club contest.



Reading Group Questions

Reading
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1. On the first page, we are told that Bennie and Alice, despite identical DNA, are polar opposites—but are they? Aside from appearance, in what ways are these women “twins”? What traits do they share?
2. Alice was given up for adoption and Bennie was raised by their mother. Who do you think had a better life? Why? What impact do you think this had on the person Alice has become? Do you think Alice uses this as justification for her horrible acts? Does Bennie owe Alice anything? Why or why not?
3. *Think Twice* asks the question: Is evil born or bred? How does the book explore the question, and how would you answer that question? Do you think there can be evil in a good person, and good in an evil person? Explain. When pushed to the limit, do you think we are all capable of evil? Talk about what might make you do something you would otherwise never do.
4. Both Alice and Bennie have a chance to kill one another, yet neither goes through with it. Why do you think that is?
5. What is the significance of Alice’s decision to bury Bennie alive? Is it cruel torture, a flash of compassion, or simply an error in judgment? In what ways have they both “buried” each other over the years? Is this act metaphoric of something else?
6. If Valentina had not intervened, do you think Bennie would have shot and killed Alice? Would she have been justified? Would you have forgiven her? Is that the same question? In what way would killing Alice have led to Bennie’s own destruction?

*Keep on
Reading*

7. Why is it unsettling to imagine one has a doppelganger, a double, a second self walking the earth? If you found out that you had a twin you had never met, would you feel excited to embrace your long lost sibling, or would you feel threatened by this *other* you? What impact do you think it would have on your life and close relationships?
8. Mary DiNunzio has worked closely with Bennie for years, yet she was easily fooled by Alice. Why? Why was Mary so inclined to believe Alice's impersonation? Was she just distracted by her recent troubles with Anthony, or was she blinded by Bennie's new found admiration for her?
9. Speaking of her relationship trouble, what did you think about Mary's decision about the house? Did you agree or disagree? Why? Is Anthony old fashioned to want to be the main breadwinner in their relationship, or is that urge to provide in a man's nature? How are disparate salaries playing a role in today's relationships?
10. Is Valentina a real witch or a charlatan? Does she have superpowers or just a good gut instinct? Do you trust your instincts? Have you ever had an experience that led you to believe you might have a sixth sense?