



## The Pit and the Pendulum

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“Terror is not of Germany, but of the soul,” said Poe in the preface to his TALES OF THE GROTESQUE AND ARABESQUE. In other words, Poe rejected the conventional trappings of the Gothic horror tale and tried, instead, to create the effect of terror by leaving much to the imagination, while at the same time giving minute details which create verisimilitude.

A victim of the Inquisition, the narrator of “THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM” finds himself confined in a torture chamber. He escapes by plunging into a pit, only to face further terror in the form of a swinging pendulum with a razorlike blade that descends closer to his body with each swing.

The entire plot consists of the narrator’s responses to this plight. He endures a series of dreadful predicaments which hasten the disintegration of his mind and body in this living death. Despite the seeming futility of his condition, he absurdly struggles to save himself from each dilemma, only to face a yet more horrible situation. At various times, hope revives, and his mind becomes calm, attaching itself to a trifle or matter-of-factly calculating the dimensions of the prison. At other times, his mind plunges into despair and his senses betray him, especially toward the end when he perceives the shape of the room changing.

The tale ends with the unexpected deliverance of the narrator from the scene of terror. On the literal level, he is liberated by the enemies of the Inquisition, but the real story is one of the mind saved from annihilation or madness.

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