The Spanish Inquisition In Pit And The Pendulum By Edgar Allen Poe

Edgar Allen Poe was one of the most influential American authors of the 19th century. Though he was prolific in writing and his works are acclaimed, he only earned one literary award during his short life. Living during the romantic era of art, he would write mostly short stories and poetry. With a reimagined gothic twist to his style of writing, he would tackle major themes such as murder, lost love, and descent into madness. These themes were implanted into Poe's mind from the start of his life, which was riddled with family disappointments. Poe would go on to write great works that would eventually show up in many text books and literary analyses. Because of the life he had, he gained the ability to write such thought-provoking scenarios in his macabre style, which is what made him an unmatched author for his time.

Poe had an unconventional life that molded him into the author he would become. He was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts. His father, David, would abandon him and leave him with his mother. David would then die a year after Edgar was born. His mother, Elizabeth, who was a struggling young actress, would die a year after her husband. This would leave Edgar an orphan. He was brought in by a man and his wife, named John and Francis Allan respectively. There, he would be known as Edgar Allan. The Allan family had a decent amount of wealth at the time. Poe was spoiled by his new parents even though they never truly adopted him. He learned to read by the age of five which was uncommon for the times. During his early years, he moved to London with the Allans for a business opportunity. While living abroad, he went to prestigious schools where he would study language and literature. The business opportunity fell flat within five years, and the Allens would have to move back to the States. While Poe was a teen, his adoptive family inherited a decent amount of money that they would use to buy a home in a nice area of Richmond, Virginia. While living there, he became enamored with the girl across the street, Sarah Elmira Royster. He spent a lot of time with her and her family and wrote her poetry. Eventually, Poe promised to propose to her upon his graduation from college. He attended the University of Virginia where he continued his studies; however, he soon dropped out. Poe had become addicted to alcohol and gambling, creating a massive debt. He returned home to find that his beloved Sarah was to be married to another man. Trying to alleviate some of his debt, he began working in the family business. It is believed that "...Poe worked, probably without pay, in Allen's mercantile firm..." (Kennedy). This didn't sit well with Poe, so he decided it was time to go out on his own. He asked John Allen for some money and left for Boston. While in Boston, he wrote his first book, a collection of poems that he named Tamerlane and Other Poems (1827). Being short on money, Poe joined the military and served for three years. After being dismissed, he return to Richmond. He never stayed in on spot and would travel a lot staying with family for years at a time. He fancied his first cousin, Virginia, whom he later married. During this time, he continued to write poetry and short stories for literary magazines where he became an editor for as well. Writing works such as The Pit and The Pendulum, Tell-Tale Heart, The Raven, and The Cask of Amontillado. Virginia fell ill and died in 1847 of tuberculosis. The depressing death of his cousin-wife led him to more drinking. Poe died in Baltimore, Maryland on October 7, 1849, at the age of 40.

The Pit and the Pendulum by Edgar Allan Poe was first published in A Gift: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1843 and is undoubtedly a staple of his work. The story takes place

during the Spanish Inquisition. A time in spain where the Catholics were enforcing their beliefs to all of spain and anyone who did not identify as a catholic would be removed from the country. Some people were hunted down and removed by force while some were even killed by the catholics. While Poe's stories usually end with death or a descent into madness this one "differs in that he struggles against the threat of insanity and succeeds in evading it" (Hamilton). The narrator of the story was one of the people who was captured and sentenced to death. He awakens in a dungeon, not being able to see he moves slowly around the room. Blindly stumbling around he trips and feels an absence of flooring ahead of him. He throws some rubble down the pit before him and listens to its sound. If he had fallen down the pit he would have surely died. Still blinded, he feels around and finds some water that he quickly drinks but passes out shortly after due to poison. When he awakens he finds himself strapped to a wooden plank by cloth. Above him, a pendulum that would swing back and forth, and lower at a slow pace. This pendulum was sharpened and designed to kill him. With the markings Father time the pendulum "is a clear symbol of the passing of time and the unavoidable journey towards death" (Bouchard). He uses the leftovers of some food he finds next to him to entice some local rats to chew the cloth and set him free just before the blade takes his life. Although free from the pendulums doom the walls of the dungeon started to push him closer to the pit and to his death. However just before his demise the french military takes over and saves his life. Going against what he typically writes this "demonstrate[s] how varied Poe can be within narrow limits" (Hamilton).