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Abstract: The writings of Edgar Allan Poe have been adapted into comic strips in over two hundred works since 1940. Most recent versions have stepped away from traditional to-the-letter retellings of the Bostonian's celebrated stories, and have favored instead creative rewritings aimed at addressing modern-day concerns. Drawing from Linda Hutcheon's approach to adaptation as a process of original reception and creation liable to engage in a larger social critique, this essay will carry out a comparative analysis of Poe's 1842 short story "The Pit and the Pendulum" and its reworking into a comic format by James Delano and Steve Pugh, collected in *Nevermore: A Graphic Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories* (2008). If Poe's original has been read by critics as an exposé of institutionalized torture, judicial corruption, and the disciplining role of prison in 19th-century penitentiaries, allegorized in the medieval Toledo, Delano and Pugh's version translates the tale to our days to condemn the perpetuation of these practices, aggravated by the advancement of technology and mass media. In this revision, Delano and Pugh exploit comic-specific techniques to increase readers' identification, thus harnessing the remediation of Poe's story to update and amplify Poe's critique of state-sanctioned torture.

Keywords: Poe, adaptation, remediation, intertextuality, comic, imprisonment.

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Updating Poe: The Adaptation of "The Pit and the Pendulum" into Comic in *Nevermore* (2008).

0. Introduction

The writings of Edgar Allan Poe have been reworked into comic strips in over two hundred works since 1940, making the Bostonian the most adapted American author (Inge "Comic Book"). From the 1990s onward, sequential-art versions of Poe's oeuvre have increasingly tended toward non-literal translations that revise or reimagine the original texts to address current concerns. Within this trend, the 2008's anthology *Nevermore: A Graphic Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories* has been appointed as "one of the most notable recent examples of Poe's work translated into other media" (Royal 68), in its attempt to "recast the tales for a modern audience, applying Poe's themes to contemporary conflicts and moral ambiguities" (Corman). Drawing from Linda Hutcheon's groundbreaking approach to adaptation, this paper focuses on James Delano and Steve Pugh's version of Poe's 1842 tale "The Pit and the Pendulum," compiled in *Nevermore*, to carry out a comparative analysis of the two. The comic adaptation, this paper will argue, revisits Poe's condemnation of institutionalized torture, judicial corruption and the disciplining role of prison, and updates it to a 21st-century context to denounce the continuation of these practices. Comic-specific techniques take a central role in this reworking, harnessing the remediation of Poe's story – that is, its transposition from a written to a visual medium (Bolter and Grusin) – to revise and amplify his critical rendering of the penal system.

To do so, this paper will first overview the main tenets of Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as a process of (re-)creation rather than reproduction, to then move on to the reading of Poe's tale as an allegory of the harrowing practices of the modern penitentiary. This will be the point of departure for the analysis of Delano and Pugh's adaptation as an updating of Poe's exposé, with a focus on the exploitation of the possibilities afforded by the tale's remediation into comic and by the intertextual relationships established through adaptation.

1. Reading Adaptations.

The critical and popular perception of adaptations has traditionally been based upon prejudiced fallacies, such as the premise that fidelity to its source text should be the measure of an adaptation's value, or that source texts are more original than adaptations (Leitch 161, 162). Rooted in the privileging of Romantic originality, this approach sees adaptations as a "secondary, derivative" or "vampiric" form (Hutcheon 2), particularly so if they entail a transposition from a classically valorized medium such as literature to "lowbrow" genres such as films, videogames, or comic (Leitch 154).

Countering these negative assumptions, Hutcheon proposes in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) a view of adaptation that overcomes traditional notions of fidelity and originality. Despite their double nature, Hutcheon contends, adaptations involve not only "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work," but also a process of

(re-)interpretation and (re-)creation (8). In this line, the hypotext[1] should be conceived not as a model to be faithfully replicated, but rather as something to be reinterpreted and recreated, and adaptation is considered "a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary" (9).

The transposition of the adapted work, as Hutcheon notes, can entail a shift of medium, in a process that Bolter and Grusin term "remediation;" and also a change of frame or context, altering the hypotext's point of view, setting or ontological status (8). Via this "repetition with variation" formula (4), adaptations are able to reaccentuate and reinterpret certain elements of their hypotext, and thus can be harnessed to engage with wider social and cultural debates (94).

Hutcheon's views on remediation prove particularly relevant for the analysis of *Nevermore*'s adaptation: far from privileging one medium over another, she points out that each has distinct tools of expression at its disposal, and thus can achieve certain sets of effects better than others (24). In the case of transpositions from the "telling" to the "showing" mode, such as Delano and Pugh's reworking of Poe's story into comic, the remediation places new demands on the reader, who is forced to no longer be "a passive recipient", but an "active contributor to the aesthetic process, working to decode sign and to create meaning" (134).

Fig. 1. August M. Froelich, "The Pit and the Pendulum", *Classics Illustrated*, 1947.

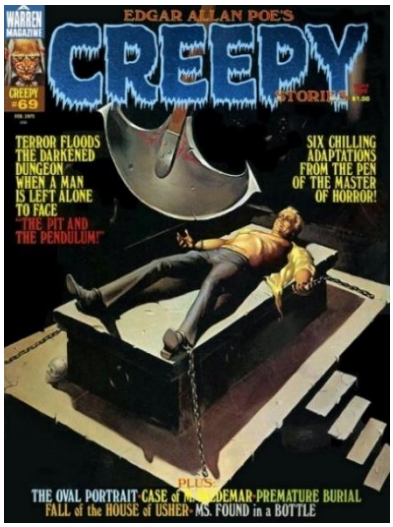

Fig. 2. James Warren, "The Pit and the Pendulum", *Creepy*, 1975.

Drawing from these tenets, Hutcheon proposes a classification of adaptations into a continuum based on their relationships with the original sources, locating on one end "forms in which fidelity to the prior work is a theoretical ideal," and on the other

[1] Hypotext is a term coined by the French literary critic Gérard Genette in his seminal monograph *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), where he drafts a taxonomy of the different relationships that can occur between texts. The study focuses on hypertextuality, which he defines as "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (5). Genette's coinage has become the preferred designation for source texts from which other texts are derived in literary criticism, and will be used thus throughout this paper.

"retellings of familiar tales and revisions of popular ones" (171). Most early comic versions of Poe's works, such as the *Classic Illustrated* and the *Creepy* series (see Figures 1 and 2), gravitate toward the former end, as "straightforward and static representations of the material" with little room for narrative creation (Royal 55). More recent adaptations, however, tend to approach the latter end of Hutcheon's continuum. According to Royal, since the 1990s transpositions of Poe's works into sequential art have opted for "nonliteral translations through differentiated contexts" (55), venturing into creative channels and developing the artistic potential of visual storytelling. *Nevermore* can be pinned down among the latter interpretations, as a compilation of nine of Poe's classic stories and poems reimagined in contemporary or futuristic settings. Attuned to Hutcheon's pioneer approach to adaptation as (re-)creation, *Nevermore* transposes Poe's hypotext in context and medium to address current social debates and demands an engaged, active audience ready to reflect on their own standing toward the issues raised.

2. Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" as an Allegory of the Modern Penitentiary.

In the essay "The Poetic Principle," Poe formulates one of his most influential critical principles, anti-didacticism:

> I allude to the heresy of *The Didactic*. It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. But the simple fact is that there neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified – more supremely noble than the poem written solely for the poem's sake. (201–202)

This rejection of didactic intentions in favor of the search for unity of effect and beauty ("Philosophy" 268, 269) has informed most critical inquiry on "The Pit and the Pendulum", which has centered on stylistic issues such as the presence of Gothic elements (Ljungquist), or the tracing of possible sources for the narrated material (Clark). Nonetheless, in recent years there has been a rise in scholarly readings that see the tale as thematizing diverse social and political aspects of antebellum America. For instance, scholars such as Joan Dayan or Teresa A. Goddu have examined the story through the lens of law and slavery. One of the most suggestive approaches to the tale, especially for the analysis of *Nevermore*'s adaptation, is that put forward by Jason Haslam in "Pits, Pendulums and Penitentiaries". Haslam frames the short story in the "debates surrounding prisons, punishment, and the public sphere" that followed the introduction of solitary confinement into American jails in the early 19th century (269), a shift in punitive practices most famously analyzed in Michael Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975).

As Haslam spells out, the modern penitentiary made punishment "private, hidden behind closed walls," displacing the earlier tradition of making "public spectacle of corporal punishment" (268). As opposed to the previous displays of violent chastisements or bloody executions, this new model of punishment was based on "isolation, bodily pain, and the passage of time," while the threat of death was relegated to the function of "a limit

case for terror" (274). Despite having been removed from the public space, imprisonment continued to be harnessed as a tool to create a docile citizenry. As Foucault recounts, the public spectacle of torture had functioned as "a political operation" (53), a manifestation of power and affirmation of the asymmetry of social forces on part of the sovereign, who used the "tortured, dismembered, amputated, symbolically branded" body of the prisoner to promulgate a policy of terror (8). Unlike public punishments, which could elicit sympathy for the criminal and give rise to civil unrest, in-prison penalties discouraged active empathy for the criminal while still enforcing civic discipline. Once the theatrical presentation of pain was substituted by private punishment, the sovereign's policy of terror continued to be broadcasted beyond the prison gates through the public circulation of trials and sentences (Foucault 9), as well as through literature and word of mouth (Haslam 273), which ensured the preservation of a disciplined social body.

These issues are narrativized in Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," which illustrates the workings and cultural purposes of the modern prison through the allegorical inquisitorial setting. To begin with, the narrator's captivity illustrates the shift from the "direst physical agonies" of earlier public punishment to the "hideous moral horrors" (Poe, "The Pit" 140) issued in confinement. The narrator is subject to the new punitive practices of isolation and passage of time, metaphorized in the story's reigning symbols: the pit and the pendulum. Their effects on the prisoner's psychology as he "progresses through states ranging from fascination to apathy to despair" (Hughes 74), emphasized by the use of first-person narration, testify to the harrowing consequences of these new punishments.

The socially disciplining role of prison through the broadcasting of its punitive practices is likewise fleshed out in Poe's tale. The narrator is able to foresee the calvary that awaits him thanks to "a thousand vague rumors of the horrors of Toledo," "certain antique narratives" and "tales," "strange things narrated – fables I had always deemed them – but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in whisper" (138, 140), which fill him with anticipatory "shuddering terror" (137). This elucidates how the dissemination of narratives about captivity can inflict the "terror of pain and bodily annihilation" upon the general public, bringing about "a 'flat' and 'motionless' citizenry" for fear of facing the horrors of incarceration (Haslam 273, 275).

Moreover, Poe's short story sheds light on "the arbitrariness of detention and punishment" under corrupt penal systems (Haslam 280), since neither the crime worthy of "the dread sentence of death" (Poe 135) nor the prisoner's identity are disclosed. His undetermined offense, together with the inquisitorial setting and the tale's epigraph, which evokes the inception of state terrorism under Robespierre's Reign of Terror (Kennedy 15), motivates a reading of the protagonist's detention in the lines of institutional repression and speaks of the warping of justice for political or religious motives.

Lastly, "The Pit and the Pendulum" problematizes the issue of the public gaze at the spectacle of punishment. As Hughes observes, the torturers seem to obtain voyeuristic pleasure from the victim's torment (71). Throughout his incarceration, Poe's convict is aware that "there were demons who took note of my swoon," that "demon eyes, of a wild

and ghastly vivacity, glared upon me in a thousand directions" (143, 146). If torturers derive voyeuristic gratification from watching the victim's suffering, Hughes adds, likewise we readers consume with "both horror and fascination" the vividly detailed account of the prisoner's suffering (76). As we witness the prisoner's "physical agonies" and "moral horrors" with a combination of sympathy and detachment, we are conflated with the Inquisitors' voyeuristic gaze. This identification raises the subject of the public's acquiescence toward the unjust workings of the modern penal system, epitomized in our complicit consumption of the spectacle of punishment.

In all these aspects, then, "The Pit and the Pendulum" can be understood as an allegory of the modern penitentiary as an instrument of private and public control. This interpretation becomes the stepping stone for Delano and Pugh's updating of the tale to a 21st-century context in *Nevermore*, a connection that is already evoked in their foreword to the tale:

> Poe's most notorious story, published in 1842, tackles themes that remain sadly relevant even today. Originally set during the Spanish Inquisition, this grueling exploration of judicial corruption, degradation, and torture, both physical and mental, resonates even more strongly today. (13)

3. Updating "The Pit and the Pendulum" in *Nevermore*.

In tune with Hutcheon's approach to adaptation, *Nevermore*'s "The Pit and the Pendulum" does not limit itself to reproducing Poe's original, but engages in a process of reinterpretation and recreation that updates the tale's concerns to a 21st-century setting. Delano and Pugh's version carries out a transcoding or remediation of Poe's story from the narrative medium into sequential art, thus moving from the telling to the showing mode. More strikingly, the comic ushers in a transposition of context, replacing the inquisitorial dungeon of medieval Toledo with a modern anesthetized cell in an unspecified location.

Much like Poe's original, *Nevermore*'s "The Pit and the Pendulum" follows the thoughts of an unnamed prisoner, sentenced to death for an unknown offense, as he is subjected to solitary confinement, deprivation, torture, and ultimately death. The comic opens *in medias res*, with a panel focalized through the point of view of the narrator, whose sight is impeded by a burlap hood. Shifting to external focalization, the setting of the story is presented: a circular, aseptic dungeon traversed by a pit (see Figure 3). After the prisoner uncovers his head, a blinding artificial light is lit, making the steel walls of the prison scorch and the convict, deprived of any food or water, faints of dehydration. He lapses into unconsciousness, his mind assaulted by flashbacks of his detention, interrogation, and trial. The captive wakes up to find himself hanging from his feet, suspended as "a carcass hung to await the butcher's knife" (19), swinging like a pendulum inside a forest of blades bound to impale him (see Figure 4). In a last act of resistance against his capturers, he attempts suicide by freeing himself from his ties and precipitating toward the blades, but, instead, he falls through a pit and lands in a clinic-like execution

chamber. There, as he listens to the tribunal chairman declaim his sentence, he is bounded, gagged, and spiked with "icy poison," put to death in a "ritual slaughter" (23).

Fig. 3. Delano, Jamie, and Steve Pugh, "The Pit and the Pendulum", 14.

Fig. 4. Delano, Jamie, and Steve Pugh, "The Pit and the Pendulum", 19.

As the comic scholar Thomas Inge remarks, sequential art disposes of a set of "distinctive visual and verbal techniques, artistic and technical possibilities" which come into play for the adaptation of narratives from other media ("Poe" 3). In this vein, Delano and Pugh's remediation of Poe's original mobilizes the comic's double expressive potential – the verbal and the visual – to accentuate the portrayal of the "moral horrors" of incarceration, and to enlist readers as "active contributors to the aesthetic process" (Hutcheon 134).

On the one hand, the comic's text transcribes the convict's inner monologue during his confinement. Although the text never quotes Poe's tale *verbatim*, it does resemble the original closely in its content, featuring similar recollections of the protagonist's imprisonment and trial, and reflections on his distressed psychological and physical state. The captive's account, written in the first-person and present tense, creates a heightened sense of immediacy and tension, more urgent than Poe's retrospective account. Furthermore, Delano's narrator addresses the audience directly on several occasions, defending himself from the readers' judgment and pleading them to sympathize with his situation, as when he exclaims "suicide: the coward's option, I hear you accuse" (21), or "and you too would confess such 'crimes', if they had seized you and dragged you to that place" (18). These narrative devices intensify the audience's engagement with the protagonist's predicament, exploiting the expressive potential of the comic's text.

Pugh's art is likewise aimed at eliciting reader identification with the convict, namely through its play with focalization and perspective. The first and last panels of the comic – representing the burlap hood and the gas mask that cover the narrator's face – are focalized through the prisoner's point of view, and thus channel his feeling of suffocation

and entrapment. Throughout the rest of the story, conversely, Pugh deploys a camera-eye external perspective that allows him to realistically represent the setting and tortures that the captive undergoes. Pugh's drawing style, in black-and-white and grittily realistic, enhances this true-to-life approach to in-prison punishment, again boosting the audience's involvement through the exploitation of visual art's dramatic possibilities.

As this paper has argued, Delano and Pugh's transposition encompasses not only the story's medium, but also its context. Central themes in Poe's tale, such as the study of the imprisoned psyche, the arbitrariness of justice, the disciplining role of prison, and the public gaze at punishment, retain their centrality in *Nevermore*'s "The Pit and the Pendulum", but are actualized and reinterpreted through a 21st-century lens to address the particularities of our contemporary setting.

As in the medieval dungeon of the original, the prisoner is subjected to torture to obtain a forced confession and is then prey to a penalty based on isolation, the passage of time, and the impending threat of death. Pugh and Delano's work dives into the exploration of the prisoner's psyche under these "physical agonies" and "moral horrors." Subjected to constant indignities, the prisoner oscillates between desperation and outrage at "the injustice that has destroyed me" (16), and "a futile pride that forces me to deny my jailers final satisfaction" (16), not to prostrate to their wish for humiliation and self-annihilation. Similar to Poe's narrator, the convict's spirit does not relinquish, but always nurtures "a futile hope of survival" (15). This is the impetus informing his suicide attempt, a "brief triumph" at self-assertion "cruelly betrayed" by the torturers (22), who finally manage to yield him into "an inescapable slump of despair" (22). These extreme psychological states, explored through the first-person narration in the original, assume greater poignancy in the adaptation thanks to the correspondence between the prisoner's feelings and Pugh's drawings: the comic's otherwise sharp lines grow blurred as the prisoner faints of dehydration, the panels elongate to signal his lengthy confinement in the dungeon (see Figure 3) or overlap each other to evoke its claustrophobic feeling, and the background turns expressionistic rather than realistic as the convict falls through the pit of blades, reflecting his frightful and desperate situation (see Figure 4).

If the vivid exploration of the prisoner's psyche illuminates the inhuman effects of the punitive practices dating back to the modern penitentiary, the recollections of his detention and interrogation bring to the fore its arbitrariness and corruption. The unnamed prisoner declares himself "ignorant of the charges that condemn him" (17), only confesses to his "terrible but unspecified offense" (18) after bearing appalling tortures, and is granted "no opportunity for defense or mitigation" against "the stone-faced tribunal" (18), the modern counterpart of Poe's "black-robed judges" ("The Pit" 135). Throughout this ghastly process, he is deprived of nourishment, human contact, and even of light, for he has his face covered by a hood "to protect those who must abuse me from the risk of empathy" (14). These brutal practices, as in Poe's tale, portray the judicial corruption and abuses at work both in Inquisitorial times and in the 21st century.

This denunciation of injustice in the penal system gains currency if the echoes of political repression present throughout the comic are taken into account. The convict

seems to have been indicted for political reasons at the hands of an authoritarian regime, and considers himself guilty only of "doubting that which they would not have us doubt" (18). As shown in Figure 5, the recollections of his arrest evoke the imagery of state-enforced violence, particularly of the War on Terror, which reinforces the suggestion of the convict being a political prisoner. His detention, then, amounts to an "exemplary execution" on part of the state to dissuade further social dissidence (15).

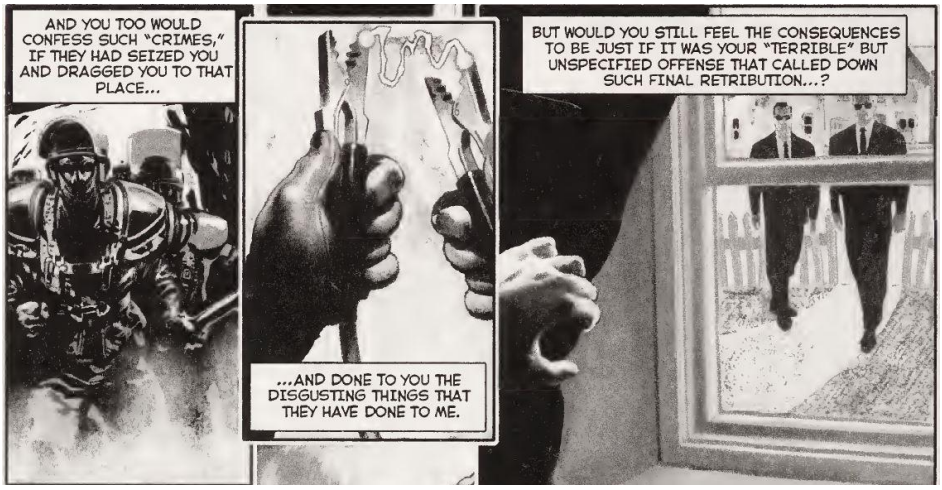

Fig. 5. Delano, Jamie, and Steve Pugh, "The Pit and the Pendulum", 18.

Through these allusions to institutional violence for political reasons, *Nevermore*'s version expands the critique of the disciplining role of the prison delivered in Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." The circulation of punishment narratives, the comic discloses, continues to be instrumental for the suppression of civic dissent. The comic's depiction of prison as a tool for social control culminates in the final page, where the death sentence read to the prisoner as he is spiked with the lethal injection, inscribed in the extra-panel space in a billboard-like font, proclaims:

> The first duty of the state is to protect its citizens from attack by malicious act or corrosive ideology. Only by the unbending example of firm justice will our enemies be depolarized, and our righteousness affirmed. So let it now be witnessed and recorded that the prisoner, refusing any expression of regret and option of redemption, is lawfully deprived of life. (23)

As part of this updated exposé of imprisonment's cultural functions, the comic showcases how mass media and surveillance have become yet another regulatory practice, channeling, in Foucault's words, "punishment-as-spectacle to deliver a docile social body" (138). This is most notable in the scenes reproduced in Figure 6, where the presence of a camera eye and a wall of screens while the prisoner receives the lethal injection suggests that his captivity and execution are being publicized and broadcasted as a cautionary example for society at large, illustrating Foucault's contention that the admonitory role of public punishment was transferred to trials and sentences in the modern penitentiary (9).

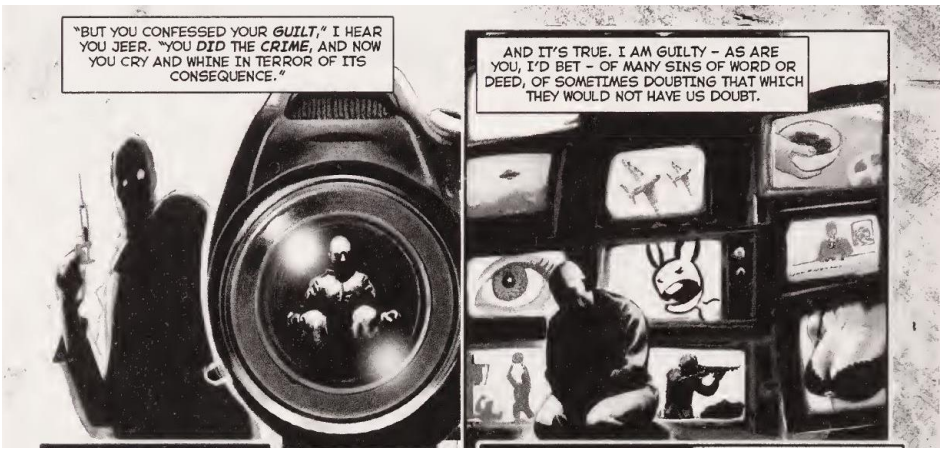

Fig. 6. Delano, Jamie, and Steve Pugh, "The Pit and the Pendulum", 18.

The issue of the public gaze at punishment raised by Poe's original gains momentum in connection with the comic's rendering of Foucauldian surveillance. Besides the broadcasting of his execution to the general public, the prisoner is aware of being watched by his "sadist" torturers at all times (15), and repeatedly refuses to grant them the "final satisfaction" of surrender (16). Moreover, the prisoner's calvary is vividly reported to the readers, who become conflated with the imprisoners' morbid gaze and thus complicit in the inmate's punishment. This voyeuristic consumption of the tortures is enhanced by the visual expressiveness of the comic medium, which directly presents the punishment-as-spectacle to the audience rather than relying on their imagination. As in the Foucauldian panopticon, then, "the gaze is alert everywhere" in the comic's prison (Foucault 195). This ubiquitous surveillance, Delano and Pugh seem to suggest, does not limit itself to the bars of the cell, but extends to what Foucault terms "the carceral texture of society" (304), where all citizens are rendered into "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" and "produces subjected, practiced and docile bodies" (201, 138). By siding the readers' gaze with the persecutors' regulatory surveillance, Delano and Pugh's adaption asks us to reflect on our own compliance with the perpetuation of these punitive and coercive practices.

Throughout the comic, the criticism of institutionalized surveillance and repression invites readers to draw intertextual connections with other literary takes on the topic, namely George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which is directly evoked by the billboard-like death sentence. The convict's claim "they may kill my body, but I will never surrender my spirit" as he attempts to impale himself against the blades likewise triggers echoes of political resistance in the popular imagination (20). In addition, the panels reproduced in Figure 5, as well as the inhuman practices the prisoner is subjected to, call up associations with contemporary episodes of political oppression and violence at the hands of supposedly democratic regimes, such as the torture of Iraqi prisoners in the detention centers of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay under Bush's administration, both infamous cases of human rights violation engraved in the collective consciousness. By inscribing references both to hypotexts besides Poe's original and to current events, *Nevermore*'s "The Pit" becomes "an extended palimpsest" (Hutcheon 33) that demands its readership to actively engage with the text, establish connections with parallel

occurrences in their realities, and reflect on their stance toward them inside and outside the diegetic world.

In short, Delano and Pugh harness the expressive possibilities of adaptation to amplify the critique of Poe's original story and address contemporary social issues. Despite widespread narratives of progress, *Nevermore*'s "The Pit and the Pendulum" implies that the production of terror at hands of the state narrativized by Poe in the 1840s remains entrenched in our 21st-century society, in a more lethal mutation bolstered by technology, mass media, and institutionalized surveillance.

4. Conclusion.

This paper has carried out a comparative analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 short story "The Pit and the Pendulum" and its adaptation into comic form by Steve Pugh and Jamie Delano in the anthology *Nevermore* (2008). Delano and Pugh's reworking, attuned with Linda Hutcheon's approach to adaptation as a process of (re-)creation and (re-)interpretation liable to engage with social and political debates, does not limit itself to a faithful remediation of Poe's narrative into sequential art, but engages in a contextual transposition from medieval Toledo to a 21st-century setting. Positioned within the recent turn in scholarship toward historicizing reassessments of Poe's tales, this reading is grounded on Haslam's interpretation of "The Pit and the Pendulum", which posits the tale as a critical rendering of the modern prison's arbitrary practices and disciplinary purposes, allegorized through the inquisitorial setting.

Taking this as a point of departure, this paper has outlined the ways in which *Nevermore*'s revision leverages the adaptation of Poe's tale into a present-day setting to shed light on the continuation of unjust judicial practices. On the one hand, the comic illustrates the harrowing aftermath of modern punitive mechanisms – isolation, time, and the impending prospect of death – over the dehumanized prisoner's psyche, as well as the arbitrary workings of the judicial system. Furthermore, the allusions to political repression in the convict's detention and televised execution disclose a corrupt alliance between the punitive system and the authoritarian sovereign, whose absolute power is affirmed and broadcasted to the public through the brutalized body of the convict. These disciplining practices, already at work in Poe's 19th-century America, are aggravated in the contemporary context by the rise of technology and mass media, through which the sovereign's gaze, as in a 1984esque panopticon, monitors its subjects outside and inside the prison gates.

The harnessing of the comic genre's double set of expressive tools proves instrumental for this reworking: the present tense and direct address of the narrator's inner monologue enhance readers' identification with his plight, while the drawings' plays with focalization and perspective alternatively side the audience with the prisoner and his torturers. Through this ambivalent identification, the comic thematizes the public's gaze at the captive's punishment-as-spectacle, literally rendered in visual form through the comic strips, and forces the reader to grapple with their own acquiescence toward similar real-life events. These are inscribed into the comic through a palimpsestic layering of

historical allusions and intertextual references which reinforces the connection between the events depicted and the extra-diegetic world of the audience.

If Poe's original can be deemed an intervention in 19th-century debates following the introduction of modern punitive practices, then Delano and Pugh's reimagining recasts the tale's goal to address current scandals and concerns, in keeping with the growing tendency toward creative reinterpretations among comic adaptations of Poe's work. This generic and contextual transposition of "The Pit and the Pendulum" revamps the Bostonian's tale for today's audiences and conflicts, and makes clear that his legacy remains momentous and suggestive for our 21st-century society.

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