

Bedlam is the Only Cure: Inverting Panoptic Biopower and the Failure of a Psychotic Revolution in Poe's "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether"

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"a madman is not necessarily a fool"
— E. A. Poe, "The System of Dr. and Prof. Feather" (11)

"In a completely sane world, madness is the only freedom"
— J. G. Ballard, *Running Wild* (13)

"It is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane"
— Philip K. Dick, *VALIS* (1)

I. Introduction

There are a variety of popular interpretations of Poe's "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" (1845) (hereon *Tarr and Fether*). Some of these describe the text as a satirical political commentary on American democracy, a latently subversive polemic against nineteenth Century American medico-legal praxes and their ancillary institutions, or as a parody of the works of other notable authors such as Charles Dickens and Nathaniel Parker Willis. However, the fact that Poe's narrative transpires within the confines of an asylum or *Maison de Santé* suggests that the text is also importantly theoretically complex in terms of its engagement with themes of power and mental illness. Referring primarily to Michel Foucault's discussion of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and his analysis of the relationship between madness and the asylum in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965), this article will explore how Poe's narrative presents madness and bedlam as active, latently revolutionary forces that disrupt the primary psychophysical principles of power and control. Foucault's work concerning power and madness is well-suited to the exploration of the themes in Poe's narrative because it is recursively concerned with the relations of power, its institutions, and the praxes of its various apparatuses. Therefore, this article will orient its discussion around Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. In doing so, it will analyse the panoptic regime of the asylum to show how atypical behaviours and dispositions can disrupt both the principle and praxis of biopower which, in the case study of Poe's narrative, manifests as carceral power over the story's patient-inmates. By performing a close Foucauldian reading of Poe's narrative, this article hopes to delineate and scrutinise the ways in which Poe presents madness and bedlam as both literal and metaphorical forms of disruptive agency against the criminalisation of socio-culturally excrescent forces/behaviours and the pathologising of discord, ruckus, sensuality, excess, the abject, and the absurd.

Poe's narrative follows an unnamed speaker who visits a *Maison de Santé* (hereon *Maison*) in southern France. According to the speaker's travelling companion, "the regulations of these private mad-houses were more rigid than the public hospital laws" (Poe 1003). The distinguishing feature of this institution is its unusual method of treating various forms of mental illness known as the 'system of soothing' (hereon *system*). The speaker's unnamed companion informs him that he is familiar with one Monsieur Maillard, creator of the *system* and superintendent of the *Maison*, and introduces the two before departing. The speaker describes Maillard as "a portly, fine-looking gentleman of the old school, with a polished manner, and a

certain air of gravity, dignity, and authority” (Poe 1003), characterisations -- ones associated with reserve, reason, and measure -- that become important later in the story. Despite his seemingly avuncular status and deportment, a circumspect reader may recognise a subtle pun on Maillard's name, reminiscent of the French term *malade*, meaning 'sick'.

The nature and institutional praxes of the *Maison* are described as being antithetical to the speaker's expectations regarding the running and management of an asylum and the administration of treatment for its patients. Maillard later provides a more robust explication of the *system* as one in which

(T)he patients were menages-humored. We contradicted no fancies which entered the brains of the mad. On the contrary, we not only indulged but encouraged them; and many of our most permanent cures have been thus effected. There is no argument which so touches the feeble reason of the madman as the argumentum ad absurdum. We have had men, for example, who fancied themselves chickens. The cure was, to insist upon the thing as a fact- to accuse the patient of stupidity in not sufficiently perceiving it to be a fact- and thus to refuse him any other diet for a week than that which properly appertains to a chicken. In this manner a little corn and gravel were made to perform wonders (Poe 1006).

Maillard subsequently informs the speaker that the *system* has been recently abandoned, after which the action of the narrative subsequently follows Maillard, who gives the speaker a tour of the *Maison* and invites him to dine. The dinner turns out to be a lavishly excessive banquet attended by twenty-five to thirty other people. Throughout the meal, the speaker expresses that he is acutely aware of the oddity of the excessive atmosphere, behaviour, and appearance of the banqueters. He notices that the other guests are dressed somewhat oddly in that despite the fact that their clothes are well made, they do not fit their wearers. Furthermore, most of the guests, who are female, are covered in a profusion of jewelry, including rings, bracelets, and earrings, and, controversially to the sensibilities of the speaker, elect to wear their chests and arms bare. Throughout the entire banquet, Poe suggests that, through the interaction of the speaker and the inmates, the mad and the sane, the unreasonable and the reasonable, that insanity is but one way of being. The chief irony Poe constructs here inheres in the ease and comfort with which the speaker interacts with the somewhat poorly or obtusely disguised inmates. The speaker states that,

(U)pon the whole, I could not help thinking that there was much of the bizarre about everything I saw- but then the world is made up of all kinds of persons, with all modes of thought, and all sorts of conventional customs. I had travelled, too, so much, as to be quite an adept at the nil admirari; so I took my seat very coolly at the right hand of my host, and, having an excellent appetite, did justice to the good cheer set before me. The conversation, in the meantime, was spirited and general. The ladies, as usual, talked a great deal. I soon found that nearly all the company were well educated; and my host was a world of good-humored anecdotes in himself. He seemed quite willing to speak of his position as superintendent of a *Maison de Sante*; and, indeed, the topic of lunacy was, much to my surprise, a favourite one with all present. A great many amusing stories were told, having reference to the whims of the patients (Poe 1009).

Here, the ironic harmony between sanity and insanity is predicated on the guile of the insane (the inmates) and the easily evaded obtuseness of the sane (the speaker).

While Maillard does not give the speaker any sort of diagnostic information, the banqueters (who are the patient-inmates in disguise) offer not only descriptions of their own

maladies but vivid re-enactments thereof: individuals who think they are and behave like tea-pots, donkeys, Cordovas of cheese, bottles of champagne, frogs, spinning tops, pinches of snuff, pumpkins, two-headed orators – one part Cicero, and another a composite of Demosthenes and Lord Brougham, and cockerels. Setting aside a reading of the symbolism of the objects of the inmate-banqueters' respective delusions, it is one Madame Joyeuse who inadvertently reveals that the storytellers are, in fact, the object of the stories they tell. It is clear at this point that the inmate-banqueters are delusional and that their pretence at normalcy is just that, a pretence. Latent to said performance is the excrescent, libidinal chaos of their underlying drives and instincts that are always already trying to disrupt any attempt at their obfuscation. This reaches a point of crisis with one Eugenie Salsafette, who, revealing her own pathological predilection for nudism, attempts to disrobe before the entire party. While it becomes clear that each of the inmate-banqueters telling anecdotes about other alleged inmates are, in fact, giving their own biographies and pathologies of their own neuroses, the revelations are disrupted by screams emanating from within the recesses of the *Maison* (Poe 1009 -1014).

The sounding of the shrieks issued from the *Maison's* former caretaker staff disrupts the confessional and dramatic re-enactments of the inmate-banqueters' various neuroses, causing the inmate-banqueters to grow “as pale as so many corpses and, shrinking within their seats, sat quivering and gibbering with terror, and listening for a repetition of the sound” (Poe 1014). The implication here is that the pretence of normalcy is fragile and can be completely undermined by the return of the symbols of madness, the most quintessential thereof, namely the lunatic's scream. The keepers, now being kept, in trying to retake their keep and charges behave barbarously. The inmates are pale and frightened because the yelps and wails of the former keepers act as reminders of what to them appears to be the madness of order, the barbarism of civility, the malady of medicine, the cruelty of treatment – screaming out, declaring its return to reassert its dominance over the inmate-banqueters. Through this ostensibly simple inversion, Poe depicts the barbarousness of the staff symbolically, describing their behaviours as those of the less evolved, referring to the inmate-staffers as a “pele-mele, fighting, stamping, scratching, and howling [...] army of [...] Chimpanzees, Ourang-Outangs, or big black baboons of the Cape of Good Hope” (Poe 1021). However, on the realisation of the threat of normalcy, the inmates' responses are to revert to the excesses of their conditions, not cower, nor resist in any organised fashion. In this way, madness is simultaneously a source of inspiration, power, as well as their weakness.

Eventually, it comes to light that the reason for the abandonment of the *system* was a singular incident in which the patients, granted liberty and licence thereby, successfully overthrew their keepers and carers, usurped their positions and authority, and imprisoned them as insane. Furthermore, it is revealed that the inmates' bedlamite revolution was led by Maillard himself, former superintendent of the *Maison* who had himself gone mad some three years ago. Subsequently, the imprisoned staffers break free of their captivity, at which moment it is revealed that the dinner guests are, in fact, the patients who have only recently taken over the *Maison*. A particularly brutal, violent aspect of their revolution involves the tarring and feathering of their former keepers. In the end, Maillard and the rest of the revolutionary insane are returned to their cells, and the speaker is given leave of the *Maison*.

Scholars who have analysed and commented on *Tarr and Fether* have drawn attention to its importance as an expression of the relationship between the author and the various issues and debates surrounding mental illness. Luciane Alves Santos and Maria Alice Ribeiro Gabriels' “Madness and Method: The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” note that Poe's narrative illustrates nineteenth century Occidental science's aims to remove the fear of the unknown and its teloi concerning the domination of nature and its laws. The authors further propose that fiction,

the putative opposite, actually represents an extension of the same teloi, albeit under a different name. Many of Poe's contemporaries disavowed any obligatory allegiance to the issues and debates of scientific rationalism, including the issues and debates surrounding mental illness, instead electing to approach the problem of the unknown and horrific aspects of human psycho-emotional phenomena through dreams and the supernatural. Poe, however, reinterprets the Gothic in the Victorian Age through unnamed, unreliable, and psychologically compromised narrators, of which *Tarr and Fether* presents an ur-example thereof (Santos and Gabriel 160).

In "The Irony of E.A. Poe's *Lunatick Asylum*," Daniela Fargione asserts that *Tarr and Fether*, being published in 1845, the same year in which The Lunatics Act was passed in England, is a coincidence of Poe's story and developments in global policies regarding mental illness that could be read as a reaction of the former against the latter. Interestingly, the Act fundamentally altered the concept and legal-cultural status of insanity from primarily inherent, innate manifestations of 'hypertrophic senses' limited to the domestic space, and, furthermore, from the insane being no longer viewed as prisoners but patients. Fargione explicitly suggests that such developments influenced the inversions of the relational statuses between the insane and sane in *Tarr and Fether*. It is clear that, albeit delivered in a satirical mode, the narrative is Poe's only short story that directly examines the pathology of insanity and the psychiatry thereof, and is therefore latently able to "perceive what a century later the French philosopher Michel Foucault would recognize as a massive confinement of inconvenient people" (Fargione 55).

Fargione discusses various aspects of Poe's narrative, its relation to concepts and praxes such as Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism – the prevailing social philosophy of Poe's time – and the retention of the concept that the ideal physical collocation of the insane being the basement. She proposes that the story is primarily concerned with the relationship between psychiatric management regimens, insanity, and dehumanisation. "The climax of the story is a case in point," Fargione states, that "shows a gradual process of dehumanization of the characters, which takes place through the implementation of farcical devices, such as the caricature, the masquerade, and the metamorphosis whose eventual conclusion is the deformation and distortion of human bodies with an effect of the removal of the patients' humanity" (Fargione 59). More importantly, for the purposes of this analysis is Fargione's insight regarding the tension between the forces of insanity and sanity represented in the narrative as a contest for mastery of the *Maison* in the form of a bedlamite revolution and counter-revolution enacted by the imprisoned staffers. Highlighting the narrative's final scene, Fargione states that the counter-revolution proposed therein suggests a final inversion of roles and values which ultimately "re-establishes the domain of reason over folly and literally explodes through the allegory of "man as beast,"" implicitly suggesting that "believing that order could be restored by grotesque and aggressive "beasts" is nothing but absurd: reason is as mad as folly" (Fargione 59-60).

In "Mythopoetic Justice: Democracy and the Death of Edgar Allen Poe," Philip D. Beidler's analysis of the text focuses on the characterisation of the figure of the compromised superintendent Maillard. In the figure of Maillard, and his contradictory approaches to the treatment of the various psycho-emotional maladies on display at the *Maison*, namely the *system* and the work of his autobiographical and indeed dissociative identities given the dual *nom de folie* 'Tarr' and 'Fether', Beidler recognises "a mocking reference to the "moral treatment" asylum method instituted by the English reformer William Tuke and his French counterpart Philippe Pinel – in which lunatics are granted the 'apparent freedom' of walking around in normal clothes as if they were in their right mind" (Beidler 257-8).

Similarly, John Bryant locates the efficacy of the narrative strategies Poe employs in the figure of Maillard and how he acts as a foil to the narrative's dim-witted speaker in "Poe's Ape of

UnReason: Humor, Ritual, and Culture.” According to Bryant, the masterstroke in Poe's narrative,

(A)nd the strategy that makes this antiritual of satire effective, is the unusual development of the unreliable narration. Poe presents Maillard's confidence game from the perspective of his nameless, never-fully-comprehending dupe, our narrator. Strapped to this fatally limited point of view, we learn that our ability to discern fact and illusion, sanity and madness, becomes all the more difficult. An added complication is that Poe's narrator, although finally a fool, is quite reliable at first. There are none of the frank narratorial admissions of madness that open "Black Cat" or "Tell-Tale Heart"; rather, there is the smoother slide into unreliability found in the more mature "Ligeia" and "The Imp of the Perverse." What's more, the narrator's rationalizations of the behaviour he sees are insidiously logical and quite convincing to us under the circumstances. Like the narrator, any reasonable reader would be deceived by Maillard's hoax. Eventually the reader catches on but, again, the punchline is that the narrator continues to enjoy the delusions we have outgrown (Bryant 38).

Like Fargione, Bryant also draws attention to Poe's ambivalence towards a dialectic of sanity/insanity wherein neither is privileged over the other, and both are ultimately manifestations of power. Bryant notes that being that the insane are, ironically, treated rationally, the *system* latently holds that both insanity and sanity are, *in fine*, but two forms of reason. As a direct result, “in an asylum where the insane are treated rationally and where absurd behaviour has its logic, rationality loses its sanity. Reposing confidence in madness means identifying with it; thus, it is madness that may gain you your body and soul. This liberalization (and genialization) of categories is Maillard's first step into madness” (Bryant 38-9) whereby any firm dialectic between insanity and sanity necessarily breaks down. Ultimately, Poe suggests that the madness beneath Maillard's reason and rationality is a fundamental part thereof and cannot be neatly sequestered therefrom.

II. Bedlamite Banqueting: The *System*, Panopticism, Insanity, and Biopower

The climax of *Tarr and Fether* rests exclusively on the interpretation and misinterpretation of the *system*. According to William Whipple's "Poe's Two-Edged Satiric Tale," Poe's system is predicated on the extradiegetic tension between two schools of thought pertaining to the management of the mentally ill. The *system* refers to an ethic and regimen known as the 'Moral Treatment' (hereon *Treatment*), primarily endorsed and practised by Philippe Pinel, a French Physician, and William Tuke, an English Quaker physician in the late eighteenth century. While initially implementing the Treatment to effect the widespread reform of asylums in their respective countries in 1792, acceptance of Pinel and Tukes' principles in America was rapid. In 1811, Dr. T. Romeyn Beck published a dissertation that outlined the precepts of the *Treatment* for American physicians as follows:

Moral Management. This consists in removing patients from their residence to some proper asylum; and for this purpose a calm retreat in the country is to be preferred... A system of humane vigilance is adopted. Coercion by blows, stripes, and chains, although sanctioned by the authority of Celsus and Cullen, is now justly laid aside... tolerate noisy ejaculations, strictly exclude visitors; let their fears and resentments be soothed without unnecessary opposition; adopt a system of regularity; make them rise, take exercise and food at stated times. The diet ought to be light, and easy of digestion, but never too low. When convalescing, allow limited liberty; introduce entertaining books and conversation, exhilarating music, employment of body in agricultural pursuits... and admit friends under proper restrictions. It will also be proper to forbid their returning home too soon. By thus

acting the patient will "minister to him" (Deutsch 91-2).

As such, the *system*, based on the *Treatment*, can be read as a reaction to contemporary attitudes toward insanity, whose "general practice was to keep insane people chained and locked up like beasts or to sell them for labour [whereby] the idea of restraint, as the proper treatment of the insane, was a matter of violent controversy in both England and America from 1839 until after 1844, when only gradually did nonrestraint prevail" (Whipple 124). It is at the fulcrum of the tension between the two forces, one advocating the *Treatment* on the one hand and confinement and restraint on the other, that Poe's *system* is located.

While I argue that ultimately Poe's narrative declares, both implicitly and explicitly, that reason or rationality, as well as unreason or irrationality, are both pretences and performances, Foucault's work concerning power and madness is well-suited to the analysis of what Poe's speaker refers to as "the metaphysics of mania" because it is recursively concerned with the relations of power, its institutions, and the praxes of its various apparatuses. Ostensibly, it would appear that the figure of the lunatic in *Tarr and Fether* is often interpreted as being akin to the comic character riddled with dramatic irony Henri Bergson calls "*le distrait*" in *Le Rire: Essai Sur La Signification Du Comique*, due to her/his unconsciousness of her/his own condition. I argue that the true distraction or soothing of the *system* is intended to obfuscate the latent panoptic biopower upon which it is predicated.

By panopticism, the reference is to the idea of the panopticon as analysed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. The panopticon is a type of building designed by the English social theorist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. It consists of a circular structure arranged around an observation or inspection tower at its centre. From within the tower, a single observer can watch inmates assigned to individual cells arranged around the perimeter without being observed in turn. In this way, the underlying premise of the panopticon's design is to turn visibility itself into a trap or enclosure that sustains a particular type of power relation. As Foucault describes,

Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. Another primary effect of the design of the Panopticon is that the inmates themselves are unable to tell whether or not they are being observed at any given time (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 201).

The fact that the inmates cannot definitively know how and when they are being observed produces a carceral effect whereby all inmates behave as if they are being watched at all times, effectively surveilling and controlling their own behaviour constantly. Bentham describes this phenomenon of self-surveillance as the idea of the "inspection principle." In this way, the panopticon is a biopowered mechanism for producing "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind" that automatizes and dis-individualises power; or, as Foucault describes,

(T)he major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers (Foucault, *Discipline and*

Punish 201).

The design of the panopticon emphasises a dialectic of visibility/invisibility, which reverses the principle and three primary functions of the dungeon, namely to hide, enclose, and deprive of light. This design is so effective that it presents polyvalent applications. As a result, such a design and the concept of its functioning can be applied to any institution that employs surveillance as a method of discipline and punishment, including prisons, daycares, asylums, schools, hospitals, and sanatoriums.

By biopower, a term Foucault developed in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, the focus is on the author's description of a confluence of apparatuses and mechanisms that "brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 143). In this way, biopower is best understood as

(P)ower whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms... Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor... it effects distributions around the norm... [The] juridical institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 144).

Biopower is organised around two poles, the first being the scientification of the human species itself. Taking Poe's *Maison* as an example, the inmates are no longer understood in juridical terms but rather within the remit of scientific categories, primarily as insane, a taxonomy that forms the basis of their broader socio-political status. The other pole of biopower is located around the human body. Biopower does not recognize the body in purely biological terms but as an object that can be manipulated and controlled. Here, Foucault describes biopower as an amalgam of the praxes and apparatuses of power and knowledge, what he refers to as biopower's "technologies," that work to ensure and reproduce the objectification of the body.

The surreptitious disciplinary technology of the *system* deployed against the inmates of the *Maison*, while ostensibly a reaction against the sort of repressive technologies of biopower previously mentioned, ultimately standardises the actions of the inmates and the space they inhabit. The *system* ensures a mode of behaviour within a specified space that is monitored and regulated by an authoritative body following a regimen that determines the movements and confinements of bodies within the enclosure of the *Maison*. Thus, through licence, the *system* ensures that the inmates of the *Maison* can be supervised and disciplined, albeit surreptitiously or indirectly. Taken together, the *Maison* and the *system* form a technology of discipline and supervision predicated on panoptic biopower.

In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault states that the insane whom Pinel and Tuke encountered in their contemporary Hospital Generals belonged to a fringe world whose true nature un-differentiates institutions like the *Maison* from other centres of confinement and/or correction, such as hospitals, prisons, jails. "One thing is clear," states Foucault, "the *Hopital General* is not a medical establishment. It is rather a sort of semijudicial structure, an administrative entity which, along with the already constituted powers, and outside of the courts, decides, judges, and executes" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 40). Even at the initial stages of the narrative, the unease surrounding the reader's introduction and explication of the *system* employed in the *Maison* registers as a trap. The *system* is intended to use lunacy against the lunatic, to lull him into a state of sedate complacency. In response, it

would seem that, logically, the only way to break the panoptic glamour is true madness, a psychotic revolution, whereby true bedlam simultaneously dupes and disrupts the manipulative machinations of biopower disguised as philanthropy, benevolent humanism, and the so-called detached objectivity of empirical medical science.

Ostensibly, the *system* appears and is treated as benevolent for the majority of the narrative. Much like the innovations established by Tuke, Maillard's *system* revolutionises the management regimen of madness by introducing

(A) mediating element between guards and patients, between reason and madness [whereby] the space [traditionally] reserved by society for insanity would now be haunted by those who were "from the other side" and who represented both the prestige of the authority that confines and the rigour of the reason that judges. The keeper [of the Maison] intervenes, without weapons, without instruments of constraint, with observation and language only; he advances upon madness, deprived of all that could protect him or make him seem threatening, risking an immediate confrontation without recourse (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 251).

While Poe's *Maison* avails itself of a diversionary aesthetic that seeks to obfuscate the carceral nature of the asylum, the real nature of any *system* of soothing is predicated on deception. The deception, in the case of a lunatic in an asylum, is that the said individual subject to medico-legal apparatuses of power is, in fact, not subject to medico-legal apparatuses of power, confined, subjugated, or Othered by malady or pathology of any kind, in any way. Therefore, the only way to disrupt this lie, "discarding the hypothesis of the benevolent lie to which we still cling," manifests itself as a revolution of madness, an "abandonment of the benevolent lie theory" (Bryant 40-1). Therefore, the system is simultaneously the benevolence of a lie and a lie of benevolence.

It would also appear that the *Maison*, under the *system*, "locates madness in an area of unforeseeable freedom where frenzy is unchained" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 76). This frenzy-of-madness, or madness-in-frenzy – which obliquely gestures to Nietzsche's Zarathustra and his extolling of lightning and frenzy as the zeniths of freedom – the momentary success of the bedlamite revolution would seemingly appear to be a reification of "the secret danger of an animality that lies in wait and, all at once, undoes reason in violence and truth in the madman's frenzy" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 76). However, during the banquet, it becomes clear that the seemingly radical inversion in effect is not as radical as it appears. While the presentation of the inmates at the carnivalesque, saturnalian, inversional spectacle of the banquet is ostensibly symbolic of the revolutionary power of insanity, it is also emblematic of what I call 'the-asylum-as-geek-show'. In this very spectacle of the insurrectionary success of insanity, the *Maison* conforms to the historical European custom of *displaying* the insane (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 68-9). As such, the *system* whose ostensible benevolence is couched in the panoptic principle of the *reversal* of the functioning and methodology of the dungeon, namely to conceal and confine, the *system's* seeming 'openness' itself still participates in biopower's historical approach to the mentally ill as aberrant bodies whose malady can be converted into capital, be it pecuniary or social, through its display which, in the narrative, is still couched in the myth of the benevolence of non-restraint. In this way, the banquet bares another sinister undercurrent independent from Maillard's deception, namely that the entire affair resembles how as late as 1815, "the hospital of Bethlehem exhibited lunatics for a penny, every Sunday," generating an "annual revenue from these exhibitions [amounting] to almost four hundred pounds; which suggests the astonishingly high number of 96,000 visits a year" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 68-9).

Similarly, in France, the praxis of displaying the insane constituted "Sunday distractions

for the Left Bank bourgeoisie," which, at its core, was a praxis of displaying the mentally ill like curious animals, where the insane were made to perform tricks under the punitive measure of the whip for entertainment (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 69). While the banquet is the obvious symbol of the emancipation of the insane from stricture, direct and indirect, the banquet, predicated on a series of confessional re-enactments and revelations, is also a display of how "it is the madmen themselves who are entrusted in their lucid intervals with displaying their companions, who, in their turn, return the favour" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 69). Here, the banquet is latently and irrevocably "madness elevated to spectacle [above the typified or expected silence of the asylum], and becoming a public scandal for the general delight" represented by the speaker (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 69). The psychotic revolution turns the *Maison* into a stage for madness's display. Maillard, like "Coulmier, the director of Charenton, had organised those famous performances in which madmen sometimes played the roles of actors, sometimes those of watched spectators" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 69). Therefore, while the benevolence of the system appears as its intentionally, conscientiously humanitarian reaction against the barbarity of the dungeon and confinement as a means of rendering the insane invisible, the 'freedom' afforded the inmates of the *Maison* is still bound by the panopticon's fundamental swindle: turning visibility into a trap.

It is important to keep in mind that the bedlamite revolt is, in the last instance, a failure. While Maillard's confession of his own malady simultaneously reveals the revolutionary potential of psychosis, the failure of Maillard's revolution inheres in the fact that even though he and his conspirators managed to momentarily (for a period of one month) disrupt and overturn the *system*, they did not destroy it and are still subject to it despite controlling it. They still understand themselves in terms of a dialectic of sane/insane. Ultimately, the nature of the bedlamite revolution is limited in scope in that it seems Maillard's revolution is more concerned with the inmates aping the life of the bourgeoisie, as opposed to living free of broader regimes of control, specifically those predicated on capital. In essence, the bedlamite or psychotic revolution is not a true revolution. If it were, then why would Maillard and the rest of his former patients elect to remain within the confines of the *Maison*, despite having overturned its structures of power? Why would they not loot the facility and escape into the countryside of Southern France? In trusting Maillard as a revolutionary leader, the inmates have misplaced their faith as Maillard's own delusion – that despite the onset of his own madness is still the superintendent of the *Maison* – is circumscribed within the remit of the *Maison* and his former role as its superintendent. In other words, the revolutionary potential of his madness is not so radical enough as to disrupt the praxes, titles, and forms of authority and biopower inherent to the *Maison* and his office as its superintendent. While under Maillard's guidance, the inmates might have succeeded, for a time, in overturning the distributions of power in the *Maison*, but by the end of the narrative, however, they are *all* ultimately still inmates.

However, this critique invites a counter-argument that poses the question of whether or not Maillard can be castigated for mendacity in view of his insanity? Furthermore, did those he convinced, his fellow insane/former wards, to participate in his delusion agree, fully conscious of their actions, to Maillard's machinations, and the expected outcome, again, in view of their own respective delusions? This question is made all the more exigent because the inmate-banqueters seemingly give detailed and spirited accounts of their maladies without being aware that in doing so, they are confessing themselves as insane: it would seem that the inmate-banqueters do not know they are mad. While they are observed and know they are observed, "but except for that direct observation which permitted only an indirect apprehension of itself, madness [in the *Maison* has] no immediate grasp of its own character" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 262). Within the remit of the *Maison*, madness has the fascinating and perhaps, in certain ways, truly revolutionary opportunity to observe itself but is unable to recognise or understand itself as

insane. Therefore, though the speaker refers to the *system* as a praxis of acquiescence, it is through the *system's* manipulation of madness's inability to recognise itself that the latent panopticism of the *system* becomes clear. Here, Poe's insistence on the private status and management of the *Maison* is not to be disregarded. The chief functioning of the panopticon is its disruption of the seeing/being seen dyad, whereby the inmates of the panopticon never know how and when they are being observed. The *Maison* inverts the invisibility of the observer and the visibility of the observed, whereby the inmates are allowed to not only observe one another but also interact with their keepers who, in so doing, participate in, encourage, and exacerbate their various insanities, thereby ensuring the dialectic of insane/sane and the attendant power disequilibrium remain undisturbed. Through the reproachful and mocking tone of the inmate-banqueters' recollection of themselves as absurd patients, it is clear that

(M)adness is made to observe itself, but in others: it appears in them as a baseless pretense – in other words, as absurd. However, in this observation that condemns others, the madman assures his own justification and the certainty of being adequate to his delirium. The rift between presumption and reality allows itself to be recognized only in the object. It is entirely masked, on the contrary, in the subject, which becomes immediate truth and absolute judge: the exalted sovereignty that denounces the others' false sovereignty dispossesses them and thus confirms itself in the unfailing plenitude of presumption. Madness, as simple delirium, is projected onto others; as perfect unconsciousness, it is entirely accepted (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 263).

There is no mirror in the *Maison* through which its subjects can recognise themselves as mad. And with the authorities that remind them of their condition of Otherness removed to dungeons and cells, there is no contradictory vantage, no oppositional perspective, not even a physical mirror that can critique and/or reflect the inmates to themselves. As such, what and who they are, that is, the absurdity of their onto-existential status, remains unchallenged, and as a direct consequence, their madness flourishes, excites, and effervesces to the point of bombastic crisis, tumult, and chaos, becoming a mockery of the decorum and sobriety of a banquet hosted by reputable gentry it mimics and simultaneously lampoons through said mimicry. Ironically, this entire phenomenon is fundamentally due to the fact that the panoptic biopower of the *system* encourages obfuscation while paradoxically simultaneously disavowing demystification.

III. Conclusion: The Insane Are Back in Their Cells and All is Right with The World

It is clear that through *Tarr and Fether*, Poe preemptively addresses numerous insights and commentaries on madness that would come to be associated with Foucault. This thematic similarity is primarily located in each author's investigation of the paradoxical liberation of the insane and their contentions/relations with physicians. Within the narrative, though Maillard, like Pinel, emancipated his patients from chained confinement, this (de)liberation simultaneously condemned them to a much more radical and insidious incarceration. Poe illustrates, with a comedic effect, that in allowing the inmates of the *Maison* the 'liberty' of expressing themselves in whatsoever form said self-expression took, said 'licence' is simultaneously used to confine them within the *Maison* itself and the subterfuge of its order and authority. While it would seem that through the *Maison*, Poe dismantles the authority and repression of the asylum, the said authority and repression remain undissolved by the end of the narrative. Ultimately, *Tarr and Fether* posits that *licence*, regardless of appearance, is not the same thing as freedom and that the *system* is an illusion of freedom, one ensured and propagated by the so-called treatment of mental illness.

The story implies that panopticism and anti-panopticism both engender biopowered effects; that is, any attempt to dismantle biopower engenders its own collapse back into biopower:

reason, unreason, bedlam, and sanity are all effects of biopower, in the last instance. By the conclusion of the narrative, it is clear that biopower enjoys the delusions it has outgrown, and yet that power needs unreason to support the grand narrative of its reason in those subject to it. Through *Tarr and Fether*, Poe suggests that madness and reason are both subject to ideology and/or are ideological creations and that it is simply a matter of which/who has mastery at any given time, be it/they sane or insane. So how will we, with our shivs of burnt data, succeed in blinding the polyphemic Eye of panoptic biopower? I am not certain. But if it is to have love, laughter, greatness, surprise, and the radical freedom of Becoming in it - like Ginsberg, Aristotle, Nietzsche, Newton, Dryden, and Cervantes tell us - it must surely be a mad affair.

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