Bedlam Revisited: Dickens and Notions of Madness

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1. The inverted world as a means of social criticism

In *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), Ambrose Bierce defines 'madness' in terms of hierarchy: 'It is noteworthy that persons are pronounced mad by officials destitute of evidence that [they] are sane'.[1] Behind Bierce's satirical humour here is the very serious observation that people with power and authority can, and do, categorise those who deviate from their own value system as mad. In so doing, however, they may too readily be projecting their own lack of understanding onto others. It is thus possible to view the assessment of madness as a defence mechanism developed to reinforce and stabilise the judging selves. When Dickens discusses the issue of madness, a key question is very often whether there might be a kind of madness at work deep in the minds of those assuming the power and authority to make the determination that someone is mad.

Edgar Allan Poe's comic short story, 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' (1845), also considers the intersection of power and madness. In the story, the narrator visits Maison de Santé, a private madhouse in France, where he meets the superintendent Monsieur Maillard, who explains the system he has developed for treating the deranged.[2] As the story continues, however, the narrator discovers that Maillard himself is mad and is actually a patient, who had earlier incited his fellow patients to rebel and imprison the former keepers in underground cells. This story suggests the similarity in the notion of madness between Poe and Dickens. During his first American tour of 1842, Dickens received a letter from Poe requesting they should meet, and responded by inviting him to the United States Hotel in Philadelphia. It is unclear whether Dickens ever read 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether'. If he had, however, he might well have viewed it as an allegory of his own Victorian England - an inverted world in which some mentally unstable people in positions of power and authority collude for their own benefit with other specific groups of lunatics.

Dickens frequently uses the inverted world as a critical topos, particularly when he reveals the minds of power-obsessed rulers. He often describes the ways in which Victorian society blurs the borderline that had once clearly separated sanity from insanity. *Little Dorrit*, for example, suggests the reversibility of reason and madness using the Marshalsea debtors' prison, and the ironic inversion of the false dichotomy casts its shadow on everyone and everything. Many of

the characters in the novel have their values inverted, including Miss Wade, a self-tormenting neurotic 'turning everything the wrong way, and twisting all good into evil' (811).[3] Along similar lines, William Dorrit, also known as 'the Father of the Marshalsea', emerges from the debtors' prison after inheriting a large fortune and gradually loses his mind as well as his spirit, both of which he had managed to sustain during his incarceration. Initially, Mr Dorrit projects his sense of loss onto his broken-down brother; eventually, however, he has a mental breakdown at a grand dinner-party in Rome. His 'poor maimed spirit' (649) finds a means of escape from the madding realities of the Eternal City in knowing of nothing beyond the debtors' prison where, supported by his younger daughter Amy, he was able to preserve his sanity. Dickens delineates the world outside the Marshalsea, whether London or Rome, as having a false sense of externality and an inverted set of values.

Mr Dorrit has much in common with King Lear. It is generally accepted that Lear's madness is contained in an inner mental space where self-edification is finally achieved. However, Duncan Salkeld raises an objection to this view, asserting that 'Lear struggles not so much with glimpses of truth through the chaos of his mind, as with a situation where truth and falsehood, reason and madness have lost distinction'.[4] This is true of Mr Dorrit as well. His imprisonment in the Marshalsea was due to his own injudicious investment, but it is entirely plausible to argue that he goes mad and dies because he has left the Marshalsea for the decadent, fashionable society of Rome – a larger marginal institution, so to speak, with no keepers – where the borderline between sanity and insanity has disintegrated. The world turned upside down is what Dickens sees in Victorian England, which is as much a prison to him as Denmark is to Hamlet, who finds something rotten in his uncle's usurpation of the throne and his mother's hasty remarriage after the murder of his father. The madness of Hamlet, whether feigned or authentic, has 'method in't' (*Hamlet* 2.2.205) and serves strategically as a vehicle for social criticism. Like the Fool's madness in *King Lear*, it appears to be intended to make an indirect social criticism of how arbitrarily and unreasonably he might be considered insane, thus triggering the evident madness of the apparently sane influential people around him. It is in a similar role of social criticism that Dickens deploys lunatics and idiots.

2. Artistry and madness

While Dickens used madness rhetorically, as a writer with the boldness to survey the world around him, to articulate his own unique vision of that social environment and how it should be, he kept himself somewhat at a remove, a critical distance, from that context. Of course, there is a popular maxim that but a fine line exists between genius and madness. Denying that there is some basis for this

observation would be difficult, especially where artists are concerned. This is not precisely to suggest that Dickens flirted with madness, but some of the characters and situations he created suggest he was conscious of the psychosocial boundaries. Perhaps one of the best illustrations of his attitude towards what was socially construed as madness is his relationship with Poe.

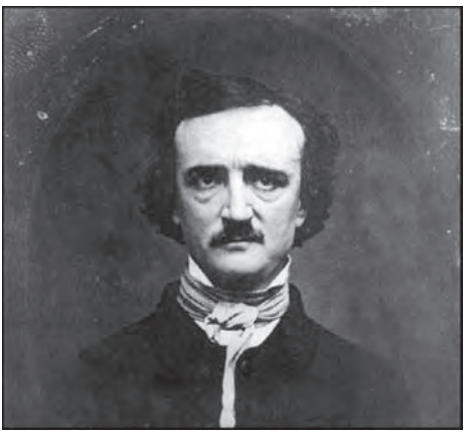

Fig. 1: Daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe by William S. Hartshorn, Providence, Rhode Island, on 9 November 1848.

Taking a closer look at William S. Hartshorn's well-known daguerreotype of Poe aged 39 (Fig. 1), one could be forgiven for discerning some level of mental instability in his eyes, even without prior knowledge of his hereditary susceptibility or his addiction to alcohol and opium. Poe had precisely the kind of highly sensitive, creative personality that was and might still be popularly called 'madness'. Nathaniel Hawthorne seems to have felt that Poe was mad, as evidenced in the beginning of 'P.'s Correspondence' (1845) with a sarcastic counter-attack against Poe's strange accusations of plagiarism: 'My unfortunate friend P. has lost the thread of his life by the interposition of long intervals of partially disordered reason'.[5]

From this American poet, within whom creative genius was inextricably entwined with mental instability, Dickens received a complimentary copy of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). Interestingly, Edgar Johnson regards the first rendezvous between Dickens and Poe at the United States Hotel as a meeting of lunatic imaginations:

> The strain in Dickens that gave rise to the eerie delusions of Barnaby Rudge and the 'Madman's Manuscript' in *Pickwick* was not alien to the lunar, demon-ridden imagination of Poe, and Dickens had that in him too which responded to the melancholy spell of Poe's lost maidens. Impressed and moved by something in

> this American poet with the brilliant mind and haunted eyes, Dickens undertook to seek an English publisher for Poe on his return to London in July.[6]

Geniuses are perhaps, to varying degrees, persons with morbidly excitable imaginations, and it seems highly probable that a kind of lunacy is exercised and thereby exorcised in Dickens's characterisation of the protagonist in the 'Madman's Manuscript'.[7] However, in spite of his apparent sympathy for lunatics and idiots, Dickens ordinarily kept an authorial distance from them. One can easily imagine that during his rendezvous with Poe, Dickens saw 'something' in Poe's 'haunted eyes', just as the narrator of 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether' saw 'a certain restless brilliancy'[8] suggesting madness in the eyes of the young lady who had replaced the keepers.

Eyes often play as significant a communicative role as hands do in the works of Dickens. Whether expressed consciously or not, they work as non-verbal elements of communication, modifying meaning and conveying emotion; like Medusa's, they petrify both the bodies and minds of those who look at them, and are often used to evoke actual or potential madness. One such example is the choirmaster John Jasper, the last of Dickens's artist characters, whose mad love for his nephew's fiancée, Rosa Bud, is characterised by a deep masochism. Dickens's characterisation employs repeated references to the frantic eyes which are typical of an opium addict – the mesmerising looks with which Jasper enslaves Rosa without saying a word (*MED*, 68).

Nevertheless, this correlation of artists with madness is unusual for Dickens. Henry Gowan is a dilettante artist and inverted snob in *Little Dorrit*, but he is not mad. The negative portrayal of the artist character in general is rather an exception. Most Dickensian artists and entertainers are presented favourably, from the lovably roguish strolling actor Alfred Jingle to the affectionate, albeit sharp-tongued, dolls' dressmaker Jenny Wren. The creative activities of art and entertainment require a freedom of imagination in order to transform the mundane, yet madding, realities of daily life. The artistically inclined serve as a counterpoint, providing a challenge to the oppression of the weak by the strong through the kinds of surveillance and disciplinary control discussed by Michel Foucault.[9]

Dickens groups inventors, such as Daniel Doyce in *Little Dorrit,* along with artists and entertainers, by reason of their creativity. Doyce represents a person who tries to turn his ingenuity to his country's service, which ironically makes him, from the perspective of people with power and authority, a public offender. Like a lunatic, he is 'shirked, put off, browbeaten, sneered at, handed over' (119). Dickens seems to keep strategically silent about what Doyce's invention actually is. For Bert G. Hornback this suggests the paradoxical reading

of the invention as 'love'. It is not so much mechanical as conceptual. If this interpretation is to be accepted, 'truth' would be a more valid interpretation in contextual terms.[10] This strategy reveals how readily truth and falsehood could be inverted in Victorian society, where the boundaries between reason and madness had become ever more distorted. If falsehood, like truth, had but one face, Dickens's novels would not have been known for their harsh criticism of various types of deception, whether in word or deed. The opposite of truth, much more multi-faceted than Hermes/Mercury the patron of boundaries would suggest, has all the manifold spheres of inhuman activity in which to work. As Dickens observed, a section of established Victorian society acted as a brake upon humanity. Although not by choice, Mrs Merdle reflects his social view: 'Society suppresses us and dominates us' (249). In an attempt to preserve the status quo, Victorian society sought to restrict and even eliminate the imaginative and creative activity found in what were considered subversive inventions and entertainment by identifying the creators as mad.

Dickens rejected this view of art as madness in a speech made at an anniversary festival of the Artists' General Benevolent Institution in London on 29 March 1862:

> I decline to present the artist to the notice of the public as a grown-up child, or as a strange, unaccountable, moon-stricken person, waiting hopelessly in the street of life to be helped over the road by the crossing-sweeper; on the contrary, I present the artist as a reasonable creature, a sensible gentleman, and as one well acquainted with the value of his time, and that of other people […].[11]

In 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (1907), Sigmund Freud pinpoints that 'a happy person never phantasises, only an unsatisfied one',[12] and in 'An Autobiographical Study' (1925), he discusses sublimation as a way of dealing with repression, defining the artist's creations as the imaginary satisfaction of unconscious wishes. In the latter work, however, Freud points out that the artist is at a greater distance from the neurotic than might first be surmised: 'The artist, like the neurotic, had withdrawn from an unsatisfying reality into this world of imagination; but, unlike the neurotic, he knew how to find a way back from it and once more get a firm foothold in reality'.[13]

Dickens does not deal directly or at length with mental abnormality itself in his works. When he does depict madness, it is in a different way from that of Poe. Madness is frequently used by Dickens as a metaphor for the distorted mental structures of those wielding power, those who foster and facilitate their frantic society's oppression of humanity. Witness, for example, Scrooge and his counting-house with its door 'open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a

dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters' (*CB*, 9). Here, Scrooge embodies the subjugating gaze. However, seeing his clerk, who has a large family to support on a meagre salary, talking about a merry Christmas, he mutters to himself: 'I'll retire to Bedlam' (11). It may seem an incidental remark, but this ironic comment on the condition of the culture he sees around him, especially by referencing the precariousness of his own mental health, suggests some important issues about power and perspective pertaining to the determination of sanity and insanity. Scrooge holds the reins of power and indulges the privilege of surveillance, but Dickens's story suggests he is haunted not just by ghosts but by a type of madness, as well.

No less important in the world of Dickens are the so-called lunatics and idiots, who are but a short step removed from artists and inventors. One might recall Mr Dick's apparent madness which is driven by fear of a brother who 'didn't like to have him visible about his house, and sent him away to some private asylum-place' (*DC*, 204). Although the lunatics and idiots are institutionally subjugated and socially marginalised as mentally incompetent by the supposedly lucid voices of those power-wielders, the notional otherness of mental illness or impairment raises questions about the operation of power. The voices of the subjugated and marginalised, reaching out from an imposed silence, suggest that rational discourse is a function of power which both constructs and perpetuates an authoritarian social structure and which itself may be far from reasonable.

3. Dickens on the institutionalisation of madness

Again, it is not suggested here that Dickens generally held a romantic view of the so-called 'madness'; he more often combined sympathy with pragmatism and regarded it as an illness. In 1853, Wilkie Collins offered to *Household Words* a supernaturally imbued short story titled 'Mad Monkton'. Dickens declined it because 'editorial caution led him to be nervous about upsetting readers whose own families might be afflicted by "hereditary insanity"',[14] and it was later published as 'The Monktons of Wincot Abbey' in *Fraser's Magazine* (1855). Nevertheless, Dickens certainly did not wish to sweep such problems under the carpet. On the contrary, he sought to bring to the general public a greater awareness of how mental illness was being treated. In fact, here too he seems to have attempted to invert the sane/mad hierarchy, in order to direct our critical gaze back towards the centre of power, suggesting that the extreme treatments being proposed by mental institution administrators were severely testing the average citizen's power of rational comprehension.

In the 17 January 1852 issue of *Household Words*, Dickens published the sketch 'A Curious Dance round a Curious Tree', co-written with his sub-editor W. H. Wills. The sketch describes the atmosphere of a dance performed by the inmates of St Luke's Hospital

for Lunatics (founded in 1750), which Dickens had visited on Boxing Day of the previous year. The adjective *curious* is chosen with reference to the conspicuously regular structuring of the dance, and as such represents a satirical jab at the discipline (in Foucault's sense of the term) of St Luke's. Lunatic asylums of the time gave frequent balls (Fig. 2), which seem to have been a pretext for ostentatious displays of the efficacy of the practitioners' medical treatments. Their motto was *similia similibus curantur*,[15] the homeopathic axiom that a disease is cured by remedies which produce effects resembling the disease itself. The axiom lends credence to Dickens's doubt about the sanity of the power-wielders, who would force order and discipline upon the mentally ill in such ways. Most fundamentally, who decides who is mad? It should be noted here that an essay entitled 'M.D. and M.A.D', published in *All the Year Round* (22 February 1862) and therefore almost certainly approved by Dickens, ridicules the authority of so-called 'mad-doctors' and concludes with the observation: 'Let us account no man a lunatic whom it requires a mad-doctor to prove insane'.

Fig. 2: *A Lunatics' Ball at the Somerset County Asylum* (c. 1848). A lithograph by Katharine Drake, depicting a roomful of agitated, abstracted couples dancing to a six-piece band under a sign reading 'Harmony'.

The practitioners in the new science of psychiatry, along with those working around them, attempted wildly cruel treatments for the alleged sake of the mentally ill. However, Dickens seems to have sensed selfish motives lurking behind the craze for extreme treatments, such as the professional need to demonstrate advanced thinking and protect academic respectability by toeing the current institutional line. He argues in the 'St Luke's' sketch that the effective treatment of mental maladies should not require the use of discipline and coercion. John Forster writes in defence of his friend that 'the true way of treating the insane was, in all respects possible, to act towards them as if they were sane', and claims of *David Copperfield* that 'what

Miss Trotwood does for Mr Dick goes a step further, by showing how often asylums might be dispensed with, and how large might be the number of deficient intellects manageable with patience in their own homes'.[16] On the whole, the only solution Dickens can offer to this kind of problem comes down to 'the acquisition of love instead of hatred'.[17]

In the pre-Victorian era the percentage of the population designated as lunatics was much higher than today, and the fear of them was deeply entrenched within the public mind. That fear is evident in the description in *Barnaby Rudge* of the Gordon 'No Popery' Riots and the rumours that circulated around them:

> [The rioters] meant to throw the gates of Bedlam open, and let all the madmen loose. This suggested such dreadful images to the people's minds, and was indeed an act so fraught with new and unimaginable horrors in the contemplation, that it beset them more than any loss or cruelty of which they could foresee the worst, and drove many sane men nearly mad themselves. (514)

Fig. 3: Bethlem Hospital, St George's Fields in Southwark, c. 1830. Drawn by Thomas H. Shepherd. Engraved by James Tingle.

The only official institution for lunatics in England until the establishment of St Luke's was the Bethlem Hospital (Fig. 3), vulgarly shortened to Bedlam. In those days the mentally afflicted were generally abhorred as wild beasts that were best chained and confined. It is true that whereas private madhouses treated patients as prisoners until the end of the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century asylums were increasingly improved in the humane treatment of the insane. This has been pointed out by many critics, including Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*.[18] However, what Dickens saw at St Luke's was a collection of horror chambers so full of manacles and fetters, swings dangling in the air, and gags and strait-waistcoats, that no sane person confined there 'would be likely to retain the perfect command of his senses'.[19] St Luke's was close enough for him to Bedlam, which was long 'a byword for man's inhumanity to man'.[20]

The influence of male-dominated medicine over the lives of those deemed madmen was increasing as part of the patriarchal power structure sanctioning and institutionalising the oppression most women within Victorian culture endured. Stepping out of the Victorian ideals of femininity and perhaps defying gender double standards, they were at times diagnosed as insane and coerced into undergoing some of the extreme cures adopted in the asylums. Marilyn J. Kurata discusses a particularly egregious aspect of psychiatry of the time, noting that '[f]rom 1850 to 1880 some physicians regularly performed clitoridectomies as a cure-all for all forms of female insanity'.[21] Needless to say, this brutal practice of sexual mutilation once again raises the question of where one should locate normality. It is not too much to say that the women were imprisoned by an abnormality projected onto them by the practitioners. Dickens observes that 'insanity is more prevalent among women than among men' in St Luke's,[22] but does not inquire into the sources of the apparent problem any more than Foucault.[23] One of the reasons why neither Dickens nor Foucault inquire into this problem, could very likely be, as Elaine Showalter points out in *The Female Malady*, the dual image of female insanity created by patriarchy: 'madness as one of the wrongs of women; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality'.[24]

Dickens's description of the self-serving practitioners silencing the inmates in the horror chambers may prompt the reader to view the lunatic asylum as a microcosm of the surrounding society, and even perhaps of the world itself. The original title of *Little Dorrit* was 'Nobody's Fault', although it effectively becomes *everybody*'s fault in a world turned upside down. It is not only the creed of irresponsible government in Victorian England but, to use J. Hillis Miller's words, 'another way of saying […] that the sad state of this world is the result of a collective human crime of selfishness, hypocrisy, weakness of will, or sham'.[25] If the ills of Victorian society had been perpetuated through an all-pervading *fault* called 'madness', the soliloquising words David hears from Mr Dick on their first meeting would be insightful: 'How does the world go? […] it's a mad world. Mad as Bedlam, boy' (*DC*, 202). It could be argued, therefore, that Mr Dick is an innocent victim who bears the burden of Victorian society's lunacy, whereas people around him are unaware that they are mentally and metaphorically imprisoned for those thoughts, words and deeds, seen as sinning against God, which they think reasonable and just in the era of laissez-faire capitalism.

Although Mr Dick views the outside world as 'mad as Bedlam', the Dover cottage of David's eccentric great-aunt Betsey Trotwood, looked at from an opposing point of view, is nothing but a private disciplinary institution in which the strong-minded woman tames the lunatic inmate. This woman's 'very quick, bright eye' (*DC*, 192),

implying her disciplinary jurisdiction, enforces a regime of docility upon the body of the inmate. As for Mr Dick, 'his grey eyes prominent and large, with a strange kind of watery brightness in them', in combination with his submission to Betsey and his childish delight when she praises him, make David 'suspect him of being a little mad' (194). Early-Victorian lunatic asylums, along with prisons and workhouses, coerced their inmates into what was for them very often meaningless work (Fig. 4).[26] This might hold true with Mr Dick's doomed effort at writing the Memorial at the Dover cottage; it is little more than a meaningless activity authorised by the supposedly kind-hearted keeper Betsey.[27]

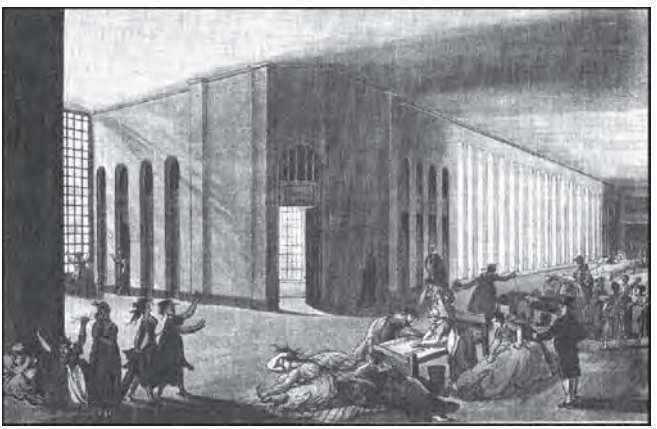

Fig. 4: St Luke's Hospital for Lunatics showing inmates employed in menial work. Printed from Rudolph Ackermann's *Microcosm of London* (1808).

Most lunatic asylums of the time tolerated their inmates' *dólce far niente* (sweet idleness) while administering their inhumane cures. Dickens claims in the 'Curious Dance' sketch that 'if the system of finding the inmates employment, so successful in other hospitals, were introduced into St Luke's, the proportion of cures would be much greater'.[28] Primarily as a result of the influence of Calvinist Protestantism on the growth of bourgeois capitalism in the Victorian era, the sweetness of doing nothing came to be regarded as a sin of no small consequence. This is why lunatics were imprisoned with criminals and vagrants at the time. Lunatics lacked the austere morality of self-help and hard work and had no sense of what Max Weber would later call the 'Protestant work ethic'. The growing power of the bourgeoisie led to an increasing reluctance to tolerate unproductive family members. Lunatic asylums seem to have alleviated the need for domestic forbearance in that regard by broadening the definition of madness and offering a rather convenient substitute for traditional home care.[29]

'Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness, have, collectively or separately, been the attendants of my career' (*DC*, 750), says the perpetually insolvent debtor Wilkins Micawber, a character modelled on Dickens's own father. Hardly driven to madness by the thought of an ignominious debt default, Mr Micawber never despairs of something 'turning up' to repair his fortunes, displaying a lack of work ethic in and out of the King's Bench. Indeed, this dubious distinction between productive and unproductive labour in the debtors' prisons, where Mr Micawber and Mr Dorrit are incarcerated, is hardly different from that of the lunatic asylums in the times of Dickens. The female malady, therefore, might be explained as a natural extension of the neurosis to which Victorian middle-class women could easily be driven because, viewed as unproductive, albeit *re*productive, members of society, they were frequently assumed to be marginal to the central project of socioeconomic advancement.

4. The fear of collective madness

Viewing work as a route to mental well-being, Dickens was hardly a radical voice in the struggles over labour economics that were absorbing various parties across Europe in the nineteenth century. If those who were out on the rim of the accelerating wheels of economic activity were inclined to direct their attention and energies away from work and towards an assault on the hub of power and surveillance, Dickens, despite his concern for human suffering, would not be the most zealous of comrades. On the contrary, there is no shortage of evidence that he was himself, like many among the middle and upper classes of the time, fearful of the consequences of a full-scale collapse of the existing machinery of power. The angry masses were certainly no less a concern, and no more sane, than the captains of industry. Thus, in the works of Dickens, we can see that it is not only institutions, such as lunatic asylums and debtors' prisons, which serve to confine individuals. Crowds also imprison them.

Mrs Clennam, having driven Arthur's birth mother to insanity and death by keeping her under house restraint, hurries frantically to the Marshalsea to beg for Amy's forgiveness, only to find herself waylaid and surrounded by a crowd of people:

> 'Why are you encircling me?' she asked, trembling.
>
> None of those who were nearest answered; but from the outer ring there arose a shrill cry of ''Cause you're mad!'
>
> 'I am as sane as any one here. I want to find the Marshalsea prison.'
>
> The shrill outer circle again retorted, 'Then that 'ud show you was mad if nothing else did, 'cause it's right opposite!' (*LD*, 787-88)

For Mrs Clennam the Marshalsea is, as it were, the darkest place under the candlestick, resulting paradoxically from her complete unawareness that she was confining herself, while trying to expiate her early sins, in the prison of her own body, paralysed in a wheelchair in the dark room she has not left for fifteen years. Within the topos of a reversible world, she is clearly far from being 'as sane as any one here'. More interestingly still, if her failure to see the Marshalsea, which is right before her eyes, reveals her insanity, one can look on the crowd encircling her, in figurative terms, as a lunatic asylum: they proceed to recommend 'an adjournment to Bedlam' (788) to her.

Betsey Trotwood tells David that '[Mr Dick] connects his illness with great disturbance and agitation' (*DC*, 205), such as the execution of King Charles the First. This is perhaps because Dickens discerns in the masses a collective madness that provokes general unrest, political instability and even revolution. The chaotic force of any crowd does not win positive recognition from Dickens. A similar point about crowd psychology would later be made by Freud:

> […] when individuals come together in a group all their individual inhibitions fall away and all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts, which lie dormant in individuals as relics of a primitive epoch, are stirred up to find free gratification.[30]

Likewise, Dickens's attempts to stress the utter otherness of the riotous masses in *Barnaby Rudge*, especially by portraying them in such terms as 'a parcel of whiskered savages' (309), betray a very real fear of the crowd when its beast-like members are strained to a breaking point. He describes the marauding mob spreading during the Gordon Riots in frighteningly grotesque terms: 'The mob raged and roared, like a mad monster as it was, unceasingly, and each new outrage served to swell its fury' (375). Worthy of remark here is the adverb *unceasingly*, since it suggests the fear of an irrepressible energy overpowering reason which would find its apotheosis in the Freudian psychology of the libido. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the Defarges carry the torch for the French Revolution, and while Ernest Defarge reasons that 'one must stop somewhere' (322), Madame Defarge swears never to stop but at extermination. In the novel, Dickens again employs the metaphor of a ruthless and insatiable beast in depicting the masses spreading unceasingly during the Revolution: 'a crowd in those times stopped at nothing, and was a monster much dreaded' (149). While Madame Defarge's mental instability could be viewed simply as a personal response to the trauma caused by her sister's kidnapping and rape by Charles Darnay's uncle, a member of the aristocracy, it requires no great imaginative leap to see the social parallel of her personal animosity and desire for revenge in the raging and roaring mob and even in the Revolution itself.

Dickens seems to have associated the madness of the surging masses with dancing. There is little doubt that while writing 'A Curious Dance round a Curious Tree' he had in mind the Carmagnole, the dance that the French revolutionary mob performed around the Tree of Liberty (Fig. 5). In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the bloodthirsty masses are identified with the Carmagnole through their ecstatic movements, and the dance becomes a craze among them, spreading like a waterspout and swallowing all the spectators:

> No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport – a something, once innocent, delivered over to all devilry – a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart. Such grace as was visible in it, made it the uglier, showing how warped and perverted all things good by nature were become. (265)

The Carmagnole 'bewildering the senses' contrasts sharply with the curious dance performed by the group of mental patients in St Luke's, which proceeded with great decorum. This is an eloquent expression of the way the reversible world, 'warped and perverted' by the turmoil of the Revolution, arouses brute instincts at a collective level, otherwise repressed at an individual level. The leaders of the Revolution also turned logic on its head by advocating the worship of a statue called 'the Goddess of Reason' instead of the true God in their attempts to break the existing authority and tradition of the period. For Dickens, however, the Revolution is nothing but the madness reified of hatred and revenge.

Fig. 5: French revolutionaries dancing the Carmagnole around the Tree of Liberty, c. 1792.

Released after eighteen years in the Bastille, Dr Manette recovers his senses under the loving care of his daughter Lucie, but relapses into delirium when his secret document is read out amidst a bloodthirsty roar from a crowd of court spectators. His relapse is precipitated by those changeable moods of the frenzied crowd which could easily revert from 'mad joy' to 'mad ferocity' (*TTC*, 257) during the heady days of the Revolution. This depiction of a perilous reversibility of reason and madness was most likely intended to serve as a warning that the prosperous British society of the late 1850s, in which *A Tale of Two Cities* was written and published, might readily regress to the tumultuous atmosphere of the so-called 'Hungry Forties'. Reason and madness are perceived as two sides of the same coin; they coexist and interact continuously throughout the novel. If its opening paragraph is read from this perspective, the paradox becomes clearer: 'it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness'. Here, we understand Dickens's social view, where the borderline between sanity and insanity was ambiguous not only in France under the Revolution but also in Victorian England under its apparently calm surface.

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[1]Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911; New York: Dover, 1958), 83.

[2]Edgar Allan Poe, 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether', *Poetry and Tales*, ed. Patrick F. Quinn (New York: Library of America, 1984), 713.

[3]All quotations from the novels of Dickens are taken from the Oxford Illustrated Dickens edition.

[4]Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993), 110.

[5]William Charvat et al., eds., *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, vol. 3 (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1974), 361.

[6]Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, vol. 1 (London: Victor Gollancz, 1953), 396-97.

[7]Leonard Manheim argues with reference to the literary genre of the 'Madman's Manuscript': 'Its purpose is really not psychological but rather Gothic, naïvely sadist'. However, as is often the case with Poe's works, including 'The Black Cat' (1843), this story is 'Gothic' in the sense that its prominent features include bizarreness, fear, illusion and madness, which could be seen to reflect the repressed wicked impulses of the madman's unconscious. Leonard Manheim, 'Dickens' Fools and Madmen', *Dickens Studies Annual* 2 (1979), 75.

[8]Poe, 'Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether', 700.

[9]Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1975; New York: Vintage, 1995), 170-77.

[10]Bert G. Hornback, *Noah's Arkitecture: A Study of Dickens' Mythology* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1972), 104-05. Little Dorrit and Daniel Doyce are described as 'love and truth' (719, 817), and it is Little Dorrit who embodies love. Her first name Amy comes from the French word *aimer*, meaning *to love*, while Doyce has 'a calm knowledge that what was true must remain true […] and would be just the truth' (191).

[11] R. H. Shepherd, ed., *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (London: Michael Joseph, n.d.), 231.

[12]Sigmund Freud, 'Writers and Day-Dreaming (1907)', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 9 (London: Hogarth, 1981), 146-47.

[13]Freud, 'An Autobiographical Study (1925)', *Standard Edition*, 20: 64-65.

[14]Norman Page, ed., *Mad Monkton and Other Stories*, by Wilkie Collins (Oxford:

Oxford UP, 1994), xv. See also Dickens's letter to W. H. Wills, 8 February 1853.

[15]Charles Dickens, 'A Curious Dance round a Curious Tree', *The Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens*, ed. Harry Stone, vol. 2 (London: Allen Lane, 1969), 383.

[16]John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, vol. 2 (1872-74; London: Dent, 1966), 108.

[17]Dickens, 'Curious Dance', 391.

[18]Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (1961; New York: Vintage, 1988), 251-52.

[19]Dickens, 'Curious Dance', 382.

[20]Roy Porter, *Madness: A Brief History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 117.

[21]Marilyn J. Kurata, 'Insanity', *Victorian Britain*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland), 399.

[22]Dickens, 'Curious Dance', 387. In the table at the end of *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon, 1993), Kathryn Hughes states that a governess was statistically the most highly represented female occupation in the Victorian lunatic asylums. This is not surprising, considering that governesses often lived a solitary life in the homes of their employers as if in a one-room cell, suffering an oppressive class bondage. Jane Eyre avoids being driven to distraction in the frightening and eerie madhouse-like atmosphere of Thornfield Manor, perhaps because of her admirable fortitude. It is possible in this respect to look on Bertha Mason, the madwoman imprisoned in the attic by Mr Rochester, as a human sacrifice who saves Jane herself from madness.

[23]Many feminist critics have argued that despite his insightful critique of ideology, Foucault remained singularly blind to questions of gender. See, for instance, Natalie McKnight, *Idiots, Madmen, and Other Prisoners in Dickens* (New York: St Martin's P, 1993), 4.

[24]Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 3. As Akihito Suzuki argues, however, 'we should understand female madness […] in a framework that incorporated their activities in the public sphere, as well as those in the private sphere, not solely in terms of their failure to conform to feminine roles'. Akihito Suzuki, *Madness at Home: The Psychiatrist, the Patient, & the Family in England, 1820-1860* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2006), 150.

[25]J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1959), 232-33.

[26]Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 77-80.

[27]Writing is meaningful for Mr Dick, as it is for David, as a means of avoiding being driven to the brink of madness by trauma. David could dispel his latent madness by creating a *spiritual* distance from it by writing his traumatic memories on pieces of paper, whereas Mr Dick could not help creating a *physical* distance from the recollection of his trauma by making a kite of his unfinished Memorial and flying it high in the sky.

[28]Dickens, 'Curious Dance', 387.

[29]A. T. Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain 1700-1900* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 26-45. In *Hard Cash*, serialised in *All the Year Round* from March to December of 1863, Charles Reade describes how sane people were readily sent to lunatic asylums and the extent to which asylum doctors were motivated by mercenary concerns. See also Sarah Wise, *Inconvenient People: Lunacy, Liberty and the Mad-Doctors in Victorian England* (London: Bodley Head, 2012).

[30]Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921)', *Standard Edition*, 18: 79.