



# **The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether**

*Edgar Allan Poe*

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**The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether** Edgar Allan Poe

Deux nouvelles pour trembler et sourire extraites des "Histoires sérieuses et grotesques".

## The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Edgar Allan Poe

Format :

Genre : Short Stories, Classics, Horror, Fiction, Literature, 19th Century

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## Samin says

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## Brian says

I know Poe meant this to be funny, but it creeped me out so badly I almost quit. The atmosphere disturbed me deeply. The setting got to me. It reminded me of stories I've heard of demons dressing as a high court people of honor and dining with soon to be supper or evil, nasty trolls in human skins having a tea party and looking with lust and thirst of blood at the guest of honor.

It centers on a mental asylum. This guy, for whatever crazyass reason, wants to visit an insane asylum. The people in charge have come up with new and innovative ways to heal the crazies. They feed the delusion until reality brings them back, for example, someone who thinks they're a chicken can only live so long on chicken food. So this guy has dinner with a bunch of insane people pretending sanity, until a plot twist. I did end up laughing at the end, and could almost see Poe smiling and nodding his head in silent gesticulations of laughter.

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## Catherine Mustread says

Humorous though condescending (not politically correct) look at the staff of an asylum and whether the inmates or the staff are the most insane. Good word play in the title which does not become clear until the ending.

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## Marshall says

Poe can write a comedy? Who knew?

A fun read with slap in your face clues that the narrator misses.

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## **Thomas says**

A comedic and dark short story about an unnamed narrator who visits a mental institute and partakes in a lavish dinner before things go awry. The narrator realizes alongside the reader that as his time at the hospital elongates, so does the suspicious behavior exhibited by the dinner guests, which leads to trouble. Soon, the soothing system discussed by Monsieur Malliard, the owner of the institute, comes into question.

Poe does a wonderful job of interspersing foreshadowing and bits of specific detail throughout "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" to build anticipation and create a vivid picture of the hospital. This piece, in a humorous and morbid way, does a great job of showing how far we have come in regard to mental illness, as well as how far we have left to go. The details about the dinner guests and the descriptions of the hospital grounded the story as its more plot-based developments occurred. Overall, an entertaining and thoughtful short story I would recommend to fans of Edgar Allen Poe as well as those intrigued by the history of mental illness.

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## **Chris Johnson says**

I read this after watching the movie upon which it is based: Stonehearst Asylum. The written story is shorter than the movie, but I found it entertaining still.

It foreshadows well, the reader gently(?) understanding along with the narrator what happened. I enjoyed it because Poe has taken the old "night in a haunted house" and changed it to a "night in an asylum". That makes it more real, shifting the reader into something more horrific because of its believability.

It's old but worth reading.

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## **Michael Kress says**

This story is about a guy who decides he wants to visit an insane asylum, just to see what it's like and to say that he's been to one. Sounds like a fun time, huh? Of course this is a perfect topic for a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. His friend who told him about it is too scared to go, so he decides to go by himself, even though it looks pretty creepy at the entrance. He meets the superintendent at the door, who proceeds to show him around. He explains that they use a 'soothing system' to treat their clients, which means they just let them walk around and do whatever they want. When it's time for dinner, several people arrive; they are all dressed nicely but seem rather strange. Later he finds out that the crazies had taken over the asylum and locked up the keepers.

There are many elements of Poe's style that really engage the reader. For example, as the plot thickens, several instances arise that give you hints to what is really happening and it slowly dawns on you how it is going to end. So it's somewhat predictable, but in a good way. The eloquent prose that creates such a dark aura is part of what makes his writing so influential on Lovecraft and others in the horror genre. This is a good one, but not one of his best.

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## Deni Ciubotaru says

After I watched Stonehearst Asylum I knew I had to read this short story, especially after I've seen that it is written by Poe.

Indeed it's a lighter book compared to his others but he knew how to keep his somber effect even through a "humorous" book...because such a cleverness (when the plot twist is revealed) can steal a few smiles from you.

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## areadersjourney says

I had to read this after watching Stonehearst Asylum... which was good by the way. Different characters but a similar storyline. It was a short...quick read through that I found here- <http://poestories.com/read/systemoftarr> definitely a goodread if you are a Edgar Allan Poetry fan.

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## Matt says

I read this story in the German **translation by Arno Schmidt** in preparation for the uber-reading of *Zettels Traum / Bottom's Dream* in which large parts deal with the translation of E. A. Poe into German.

An unnamed narrator is traveling the southern provinces of France when he decides to visit a nearby private "mad-house", called *Maison de Santé*, of which he heard in Paris. There he is met by the director of the facility who promises to show his guest around and to explain the treatment of the patients/inmates to him. However, the conversations and the subsequent dinner do not necessarily run as expected...

In the middle of the story, I had a certain idea of how it might end, but it turned out I was wrong. The ending Poe had chosen was a surprise to me in that it was sort of unsurprising. Still a good story about the fine line that sometimes marks the border between sanity and madness.

I already read Arthur Gordon Pym in Arno Schmidt's translation and was blown away by it (see my review here).

In the present story, the translator has retained himself more and the translation follows the original very closely. We find the usual Schmidt'chen quirks (& for *and*, *I* for *a/an*, = instead of a hyphen) and also the creative usage of punctuation marks, but to a much lesser extent than in *Pym*.

Nevertheless, Schmidt was obviously very careful and sometimes even corrected/enhanced Poe's original prose.

One striking example I found is this [emphasis in bold by me]:

*original*

“Pierre,” cried the host, “change this gentleman’s plate, and give him a side-piece of this rabbit au-chat.”

“This what?” said I.

“This rabbit au-chat.”

“Why, thank you—upon second thoughts, no. I will just help myself to some of the ham.”

There is no knowing what one eats, thought I to myself, at the tables of these people of the province. I will have none of their rabbit au-chat—and, for the matter of that, none of their **cat-au-rabbit** either.

*translation*

»Pierre«, rief mein Wirt sogleich: »dem Herrn hier einen anderen Teller; und geben Sie ihm ein Seitenstück von dem Kaninchen-*au-chat*.«

»*Au-was?*«, sagte ich.

»Diesem Kaninchen-*au-chat*.«

»Oh, danke, aber – wenn ich mir’? recht überlege: bitte nein. Ich nehm’ mir lieber etwas von diesem Schinken hier.«

Man weiß tatsächlich nie, dachte ich bei mir, was man an den Tafeln dieser Provinzler so alles in sich hinein ißt – ich danke für deren ihr Kaninchen-*au-chat*, beziehungsweise für eine **Katze-*au-lapin*** nicht minder.

I really wonder why Poe decided to use *cat-au-rabbit* and not *cat-au-lapin*. Maybe he was too lazy to look the word up in the French dictionary? Anyway, I think Schmidt saved the joke by putting *Katze-*au-lapin** here.

On other occasions Schmidt decided to sneak in a word that doesn’t really exist in this form, but totally makes sense in the context it is used:

*original*

“By no means. We put much faith in amusements of a simple kind, such as music, dancing, gymnastic exercises generally, cards, certain classes of books, **and so forth.**”

*translation*

»Aber keineswegs. Wir setzen große Hoffnungen auf Zerstreungen einfachster Art, wie etwa Musik, Tanz, gymnastische Übungen allgemein, Kartenspiele, bestimmte Sorten von Büchern, **undsoweiterundsoweiter**.«

Here the *undsoweiterundsoweiter* should have been spelled *und so weiter und so weiter*, of course, but by doubling the words and putting them all together we get a far better feeling for the way the director is talking IMO.

Finally, here’s an example of Schmidt at his best. The choice of words couldn’t have possibly been better:

*original*

“He was a great fool, beyond doubt,” interposed some one, “but not to be compared with a certain **individual** whom we all know, with the exception of this strange gentleman. I mean **the man** who took himself for a bottle of champagne, and always went off with a pop and a fizz, in this fashion.”

Here the speaker, very rudely, as I **thought**, put his right thumb in his left cheek, **withdrew** it with a sound resembling the popping of a cork, and then, by a **dexterous** movement of the tongue upon the teeth, created a sharp hissing and fizzing, which lasted for several minutes, in imitation of the frothing of champagne.

*translation*

»Das war, da gilt kein Zweifel, ein großer Narr,« warf ein Anderer ein, »obschon nicht mit einem gewissen **Quidam** zu vergleichen, den wir Alle kennen – den fremden Herrn dort ausgenommen. Ich meine **jenen Außerordentlichen**, der sich für eine Champagnerflasche hielt, und der immerfort, Popp-Fsss!, los ging; ungefähr so —«  
Hier steckte sich der Sprecher, (ungebührlich plump, wie mir **däuchte**), den rechten Daumen tief in die linke Backentasche; **wuppte** ihn heraus, mit einem Geräusch wie ein Pfropfenknall; und erzeugte anschließend durch **erzgeschicktes** Zusammenspiel von Zung' & Zähnen, ein minutenlang anhaltendes scharfes Zischen und Pfischen, das dem Brüsseln von Champagner frappant ähnelte.

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## **Bionic Jean says**

**The System of Dr Tarr and Professor Fether** (1845) is one of Poe's lighter comedies, although still quite black. It is an example of one of Poe's stories which he submitted to the public as an essay. The narrator is journeying in the South of France, and is recommended by his travelling companion to visit a particular mental institution which they will shortly be passing. This institution has impressed his companion because of its revolutionary new method of treating mental illness by a so-called "*system of soothing*."

The narrator agrees, and on his arrival is given a guided tour of the hospital by a M. Maillard, who he has been told invented the system. This is then followed by a dinner attended by almost thirty other people, (view spoiler)

At the end the narrator still seems to be in blithe ignorance, searching in vain for any works by "*Dr. Tarr*" and "*Professor Fether*."

Poe's satire was very topical. The general public were increasingly concerned with the way mentally ill patients were treated like prisoners and there were demands to reform the system. Running counter to this was the defence of "*insanity*" being used in court, which was thought by some to be misused on occasions, allowing criminals to avoid punishment.

I have reviewed many of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, and reviews of other stories can be displayed by searching for **Edgar Allan Poe** on my Goodreads shelves.



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## **Carole Rae says**

I'll admit...I watched the movie rendition of this short story. However, I didn't know it was based off Mr Poe's story (the title is NOT the same at all). What can you do you know?

This one was super, super short. I wish it was longer. There was so much more that could have been added. However, I must admit...the last page leaves so much to interpretation. Anything could have been assumed. Normally, I'm not a fan of open-ended stories, but this was pretty good and I liked it.

Mmmm, not much else to say.

It was a nice quick read. I hate to admit it, because I'm a huge Poe fan, but I think I liked the movie better, which I'll be reviewing it soon (maybe this week - not sure yet).

I do recommend this to those that like Mr. Poe, not my favorite, but I love the premise of it. It was good. Out of five, I stamp this with 3 stars.

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## **Zeljka says**

Excellent short story worth reading, especially after watching Stonehearst Asylum.

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## **Jess says**

An original plot told in a light, whimsical manner. The story plays with the concepts of madness and normalness, as the protagonist is lead by one Monsieur Maillard through a mental asylum. You can really see what's coming in this short story, but it makes it no less entertaining.

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## **Katri says**

Lõbus lugu hulludest, kes valitsevad hullumaja. Hullud võivad olla ohtlikult reserveeritud, kavalad ning näida esmasel tutvumisel isegi intelligentsetena. Kui peaksid sattuma mõnda sellist asutust külastama, siis ära ole kindel, et arst või ülejäänud "hullusid põetav personal" on need kelleks end nimetavad. Soovitan kindlasti vaadata ka jutustuse põhjal tehtud filmi 'Stonehearst Asylum'.

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## **Savannah Stacks says**

"The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" is one of Poe's lighter comedies, but there are still aspects of it that will make you cringe. An unnamed narrator visits an insane asylum and partakes in an all-meat dinner before things take a twisted turn. He has his suspicions about the institution while visiting, but they are not confirmed until the very end.

Edgar Allen Poe foreshadows and gives specific details throughout the text to build anticipation and create a vivid picture of the hospital. However, I wish he would have given less hints about what was actually going on, because I had it figured out before it happened. In all, I found "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" to be very entertaining and quite whimsical.

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### **Andrei Tama? says**

Un altfel de Poe.

Mi-a stârnit câteva zâmbete.

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