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Announcements:

- The 2019 International Conference on Quality of Life will be held at Kyoto Pharmaceutical University from Sept 28-29 or October 5-6 or 26-27, 2019 (TBA). Further information can be found at <http://as4qol.org/icqol/2019/>
- The 2018 International Meeting on Quality of Life was held recently. Proceedings as well as photos and other information can be found at <http://as4qol.org/icqol/2018/>

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John Jasper, the protagonist of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, is a character positioned at the tail end of a genealogy of evil created by Charles Dickens. When we focus on this malefactor, given the sheer depth of the evil he encompasses, we understand that, notwithstanding the fact that it was never completed, the novel bears comparison with Dickens's other works; in fact, in at least one respect, it may even surpass them. Indeed, as written by Juliet John, 'What distinguishes *Edwin Drood* from Dickens's previous novels is the prominence given to a deviant character whose mind we seem to be asked to read'.¹ This work, placed in the 'sensational novel' genre that enjoyed widespread popularity in the 19th century, features some elements essential for a dramatic plot, such as a mystery surrounding the disappearance and death of the main character, an evil murder suspect and an unidentified detective. Owing to the fact that many mysteries in the novel remain unsolved forever as a result of Dickens's unfortunate demise in the middle of writing the novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* propels the reader to deduce the missing parts of the plot with the fragments of information provided. However, this kind of puzzle-solving is only a small part of the work's allure, and no matter how hard or enthusiastically one tries to solve the puzzle, the solution will remain forever out of reach. Therefore, in this essay, I would like to consider the novel's specificity by focusing on the interiority of the only protagonist of Dickens' novels whose hands have been stained with murder (regardless of whether he was successful in the matter, it is obvious from the beginning of the novel that he attempted to kill Edwin, which no critic would deny).

I

One of the principal motifs of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is the conflict between the two worlds represented by front and back, light and shadow, or exterior and interior. Needless to say, it is the protagonist who serves as the central figure in developing this motif. As specifically mentioned by the

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author, the gatehouse serving as Jasper's residence has two windows, one overlooking the busy High Street in front and the other dark and eerie back in the road behind. Likewise, Jasper also has a two-faced aspect, one as an upright cathedral choirmaster, leading a life of privilege in a rural town where he enjoys the respect of the local residents, and the other as a regular customer at a London opium den. How this dual relationship changes, or, in particular, how the latter erodes and then devours the former may be said to constitute the main axis of the plot.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood starts with the depiction of the stupefied consciousness of a man awakening from an opium dream; from this depiction, the reader can discern Jasper's internal division and his inclination towards this veiled world.

An ancient English Cathedral Town? How can the ancient English Cathedral town be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air; between eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe, it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. Still the cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? (1)

The reader, suddenly thrown into the flow of Jasper's consciousness, witnesses three different sights: the landscape of the cathedral of Cloisterham, an old English town, the reality of the rusty frame of the bed on which Jasper is actually lying, and exotic scenes reminiscent of Persia with the Sultan, such as the procession of white elephants, the dancing girls and the robbers being impaled for their crimes. However, as opposed to how the former two are imbued with a brooding image with the use of adjectives such as 'grey' and 'rusty', the exotic landscape of the latter is accompanied by extremely vivid colour, light, sound and energy; it is redolent of a brutality and eroticism that might supposedly be far from the normal England of the real world. Dickens suggests a clear contrast whereby Jasper's spirit has been revitalised in the unreality of the daydream, while the familiar conventions of Cloisterham have become dull and disgusting for him.

The typical old English town appears to be a closed world, as shown by the inclusion of 'cloister' in the name. For Jasper's keen sensibilities, life in the town is certainly never one of ease. One can well imagine that Jasper would likely have struggled with various sentiments, including despair and fatigue over the monotony of reality, impatience and frustration at not being able to exercise his own talents, and disgust and contempt towards the oppression of church and society. Seeking salvation from this unbearable quotidian life, this young man one day found his way into a London opium den. While yielding himself up there to the mysterious euphoria, Jasper must have felt as if his spirit had been freed from the yoke of oppression. Certainly, it is in this veiled world that Jasper, for the first time gained a dazzling exhilaration and liberating joy, which would have opened the doors for him to a new life.

However, needless to say, the life awaiting him on the other side of the door was never going to be blessed. Beneath the public identity that he maintained as a choirmaster—with a face of outward innocence—he trembled in the dark depths of his heart in his single-minded anticipation for opium; he was repeatedly haunted by the shadows of Cloisterham while surrendering himself to the immersive pleasures of opium. If he were able to keep the influence to a minimum and only occasionally moved to the veiled world in search of ephemeral pleasure, he might expect his actions to be tolerated as a harmless and passing escape from reality. However, Jasper who once opens Pandora's box and gains a taste for opium thereby loses any hope of returning to the oppressive self as a choirmaster. Unable to bear the disappointment and pain caused by the return to reality from the heights of ecstasy, when the effects of the drug subside, he is swept into the negative spiral of temptation for even more opium, and then his addiction brings chaos. What appeared as an escape to a new life of freedom from oppression for Jasper is, in fact, nothing but an endless plunge into infinite darkness; for him, there is no choice but to proceed

further and further into its embrace.

It as a journey, a difficult and dangerous journey. That was the subject in my mind. A hazardous and perilous journey, over abysses where a slip would be destruction. Look down, look down! You see what lies at the bottom there? (208)

Jasper himself frequently calls the path he is following a 'journey', and we must not overlook the fact that he is aware that this journey is tinged with the accursed shadow of death. The sight of Jasper descending the steep stone staircase with Durdles to visit the cathedral crypt in which corpses are buried, recounted in Chapter 12, is perhaps intentionally included by Dickens as a visual, figurative representation of Jasper's journey of life. The following question may arise in the readers' minds: what does Jasper discover when, through opium, he delves for the first time (most likely) into the inner recesses of his own soul? The only conceivable answer is nothing other than his own desire to kill his nephew Edwin.

It is implied that Jasper's exotic hallucination described at the beginning of Chapter 1, rather than a one-off event, is a kind of routine that replays itself each time Jasper ingests opium, which hints at a fearful fact. In Chapter 23, Jasper confesses to the mistress of the opium den, Princess Puffer, 'I always made the journey first, before the changes of colours and the great landscape and glittering processions began' (209). According to this confession, it seems that as the first stage of the opium dream, one scene appeared first in his mind, and was followed with another which was associated with the exotic sight of the colourful procession that came afterwards. While the details of this first stage are never clearly specified in the novel, it is easy to imagine it as the act of killing Edwin. First, inviting the unwary Edwin into the cathedral with some clever words; then, winding the scarf around the neck of Edwin, who, realising his uncle's intentions, stands there astonished, and lastly tightening the scarf with all his might—for Jasper, it seems this would have been the greatest exaltation of his spirit and a source of hideous pleasure. He would have experienced the imaginary killing of Edwin a number of times in his hallucinations.

It is noteworthy that Jasper's murderous desire seems not to be caused by any simple hatred or grudge but stems from a far more complex, subtly emotional, entanglement which provides Jasper with a deep and multi-layered personality. While there is a subtle description implying that Edwin is the object of a homosexually tinged desire on the part of his uncle, it is also suggested that Jasper is obsessed with the beautiful Rosa while simultaneously harbouring jealousy of her fiancé Edwin. Furthermore, we can also see some instances of how the particular insensitivity and arrogance that Edwin shows rouse Jasper's anger and jealousy. It is not unlikely that these various emotions would have reacted with each other and eventually congealed into a single, urgent power. These nascent negative emotions—which his normal self might have been unaware of for many years or which he might have consciously denied—would secretly, yet certainly, have continued to fester in the choirmaster's heart, manifesting once he was freed by opium from the shackles of reason.

II

Initially, Jasper was able to maintain his original, normal face when returning to the society in Cloisterham, suppressing the dark parts of his inner self. However, the exaltation of the spirit, which he had only been able to experience in his hallucinations, eventually could no longer be attained; thus, it is natural that he should have turned to seek even stronger stimulation, thereby turning towards the amplification of the darker parts of his veiled self. In the process, he isolates himself further by stepping into the depths of the world of darkness, and just as the gatehouse in which Jasper lives comes to be described as damming the tide of life, he is further transformed into a presence deeply tinged with the shadow of death. Thus, in the depiction of the real world in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, this ultimately leads to the commission of nepoticide by the novel's protagonist.

In the middle of the novel, a drastic change in Jasper's behaviour can be witnessed in the surface world; he begins to show peculiar signs of being possessed by something. Jasper demonstrates the supernatural, even diabolical, ability to confuse the people of Cloisterham, infusing his own love for Rosa into his accompaniment on the piano and plunging her into confusion as if by hypnosis, bending Mr. Crisparkle's actions to his own will by having him discover Edwin's belongings in the river, as well as

fanning the mutual hostility between Edwin and Neville and successfully manoeuvring them into an explosively tense situation—these are just a few examples of his peculiar power.

Furthermore, the fact that Jasper's apparent murder of Edwin takes place during the Christmas season also seems to be a major point for understanding Jasper's transformation. For a person dedicated to service in the cathedral, an institution at the heart of the local community, to choose a day so deeply associated with Christianity for the commission of a crime is truly an act that trespasses against both God and English society. In other words, at this stage, the ordinary touchstones of culture, society and norms that had until then repressed his darkest urges were completely removed; having abandoned hesitation and conscience, he was no longer troubled by any internal conflict. We may interpret his surface world as having dissipated and the entirety of his existence finally being enveloped by the veiled part of himself that had been continually festering and growing.

'Nothing unequal',... 'nothing unsteady, nothing forced, nothing avoided; all thoroughly done in a masterly manner, with perfect self-command.'... 'One would think, Jasper, you had been trying a new medicine for that occasional indisposition of yours.'... 'I congratulate you... on all accounts.' (129)

It seems fair to think that this is also evidenced by his demonstration on Christmas Eve—presumably the day on which he decided to murder Edwin—of a perfect singing voice that is unprecedented in worship as if to earn the admiration of Mr. Crisparkle.

Later this may also be seen as represented in Jasper's evident stubbornness when he cuts off communication with those around him and withdraws into himself without bothering to keep up a front.

Incidentally, a matter that is often brought to the table when discussing this novel is the question of whether Jasper has a so-called dual personality. In *The Wound and the Bow*, Edmund Wilson famously made the following point:

John Jasper has, then, 'two states of consciousness'; he is, in short, what we have come to call a dual personality. On the principle that 'if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I can remember where', it will be necessary, in order to extort his confession, to induce in him that state of consciousness, evidently not the one with which he meets the cathedral world, that has caused him to commit the murder.²

Quite a few critics agree with this interpretation, one of the bases for which may be mentioned as the following passage in Chapter 3 of the novel.

As, in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism, there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course as though it were continuous instead of broken (thus if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I can remember where), so Mrs. Twinkleton has two distinct and separate phases of being. (14)

This passage appears to have been considerably influenced by the existence of *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. In *The Moonstone*, we find a passage wherein one of the characters' memory of his own actions while under the influence of opium are completely disrupted when he is sober after having awakened from the influence, but the memory returns when he once again slips into a dreamlike state by consuming opium, and this is an important point in the plot. When *The Moonstone* was published, apparently, Dickens was undoubtedly well aware of this ingenious idea devised by Collins, so it is certainly not impossible to imagine that Dickens may have thought to borrow the idea with the intention of trying to extend the motif of 'two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course' not only to Mrs. Twinkleton but to Jasper as well. If this were the case, then although Jasper commits a murder under the influence of opium in the latter half of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, it is also plausible that Dickens may have conceived of a situation wherein Jasper's normal self as a choir-

master, having no memory of such an act, would have protested his innocence of the murder, which, in itself, would also have been interesting as the birth of a new kind of villain.

Indeed, after Edwin's disappearance, there are several scenes in which the devoted figure of Jasper is witnessed showing concern for his nephew, pursuing news of his whereabouts and diligently searching on his own, regardless of his own appearance, thereby inviting the sympathy of others. Thus, while it appears that he retains no memory of killing Edwin, we must consider that Dickens and Collins had, by this time, fallen out with each other; Dickens had written a withering critique of *The Moonstone* possibly informed by a spirit of professional rivalry, which had apparently provoked Collins's anger. Such circumstances raise doubts as to whether Dickens would have been willing to imitate Collins's plot device without adding any original twists of his own.

Perhaps, it may not matter if we simply consider the idea that Dickens used Collins' trick like a red herring, i.e. as a means of misleading the readers to understand Jasper as having been constantly aware and ruminating over his murder of Edwin. For once, the world of Cloisterham had disappeared, completing his transformation into a being of the world of darkness, there would have been no room left within him for the existence of two identities.

III

Here, we must look at the relationship between Jasper and Neville as an important aspect of the novel. Jasper has not necessarily completed his journey by implementing his plan of murdering Edwin but perhaps, in search of another prey, positions Neville as his next target. However, although he has an ulterior motive in highlighting the dangerous qualities of this youth—newly arrived from a foreign land—to those around him and trying to impress upon them the idea that he was Edwin's murderer, there are several elements on which Jasper's emotions and attitudes towards Neville are mysterious from the beginning, and in more than a few instances, confusing the reader. For instance, in Chapter 12, in a scene where he gazes at Neville—with whom he has little familiarity—in a way that dumbfounds the stonemason Durdles, his gaze is imbued with an intense energy that surpasses the ordinary, going so far as to invite a sense of the diabolic. Further, after Edwin's disappearance, Jasper's actions in seeming to settle on Neville as his next victim and watching him with a predatory eye only escalate. The inhabitants of Cloisterham interpret this behaviour in various ways; for example, some conceive Jasper to believe that Neville is responsible for Edwin's disappearance and to plan taking a revenge for his nephew by watching Neville closely for any evidence of his guilt, while others regard his conduct to be based in a dastardly scheme to try to put Neville in the frame for Edwin's murder or to attempt to remove Neville as a romantic rival, given the young man's feelings for Rosa. However, neither interpretation seems to be correct.

If we consider that there is something more fundamental at the root of the connection between Jasper and Neville, we may be able to dispel any questions concerning Jasper's conduct. Neville from Ceylon, a country with a different religion and culture, is a character wrapped up in the image of an uncouth barbarian, and there is some latitude suggesting that his heritage has, in some ways, mixed with Oriental blood. (This is clearly suggested in the physiognomy of his portrayal in the illustrations by Luke Files). However, Jasper is a bona fide Englishman associated with Christendom, and although the two are inherently diametrically opposed, Dickens reveals both explicitly and implicitly that the two, in fact, show a surprising number of similarities. For instance, Neville's blatant hostility towards Edwin, his affection for Rosa and his easily inflamed passions could be said to be exactly the same as the inner emotions that Jasper has worked to hide at all costs. What's more, their dark skin, warped reason, dissatisfaction with those around them and sense of alienation are among some of the many other factors that the two surprisingly share, and it is clear that Dickens was conscious of their similarities.

At the time of their very first meeting, Jasper intuitively sees something of himself in the Ceylon-born youth. If so, although it is his intention to provoke Neville, Jasper's remarks are convincing in that they are marked by an unshakeable strangeness that seems to position him on the same level as Neville.

‘It is hardly worth his while to pluck the golden fruit that hangs ripe on the tree for him.
And yet consider the contrast, Mr. Neville. You and I have no prospect of stirring work

and interest, or of change and excitement, or of domestic ease and love. You and I have no prospect (unless you are more fortunate than I am, which may easily be), but the tedious, unchanging round of this dull place.' (60)

In this work, we find heavy use of the motif of the double (or the alter ego). So, while the presence as Neville's double of his identical twin sister Helena seems to have drawn attention, it also seems possible to conceive of Jasper as his alter ego. Following on from the quotation cited above, in the scene where Neville takes offence at Edwin's insulting behaviour, Neville loses his temper and dashes his wine goblet into the fire grate. However, while this may be regarded, on the one hand, as having been orchestrated by Jasper's almost hypnotic manipulation, we may also consider it the result of his perception of the presence of similar emotions within Jasper and the resonant amplification of their hearts. It seems likely that Jasper derived negative power from his knowledge of Neville, as well. We could also say that this indirectly pushed Jasper further along the path that led to Edwin's murder. The encounter between a man who came to Cloisterham from the East and a man who experiences the pleasures in the Oriental atmosphere produced by opium engenders an intense attraction and repulsion between the two, thereby producing a dramatic effect.

However, rather than someone defined by his dark side, Neville seems to have been given by Dickens the role of embracing the world that Jasper had thrown away. Neville takes a favourable view of Cloisterham as a quiet, relaxed town, and partly owing to Helena's guidance, he chooses to walk a path opposed to Jasper's by abandoning the aspects of himself that were full of enmity and emerging to live in the bright surface of the Christian world. Therefore, his presence inevitably joins with that of others, such as Crisparkle, Grewgious and Tartar, who are characterised by the goodness and justice associated with the surface world, thereby engendering a resulting confrontation with Jasper's wickedness.

We might consider their purpose as being to bring Neville up in an English, Christian world, like a lost lamb returning to the fold. Indeed, this could be symbolised by Tartar's actions in helping Neville to escape Jasper's evil influence by passing a tow line (side cable) from his room on the top floor of the Staple Inn to the window of Neville's room below. Although we can only speculate, there seems to be no doubt that Dickens was preparing a conclusion for this work, wherein Jasper would have been arrested, following the revelation of his sins, through the efforts of those on the side of the surface world, followed by Rosa's marriage to someone whose identity we do not know but with whom she could have a happy future. Nevertheless, if it had been completed, we may suppose that the reception of this work would not have enjoyed same bright and carefree legacy of Dickens' previous works, characterised by scenarios in which good deeds were rewarded and evil ones punished. It is also conceivable that Dickens may have tried to depart from the style of his later works, which are known for their darker tones, by revisiting the style of his earlier period of completely happy endings, and while more than a few critics have made this claim, it seems more likely that Dickens was no longer sufficiently optimistic about human nature to tie up everything nicely as a binary conflict of good and evil where good was the ultimate victor.

In this work, the world to which the characters on the side of good belong seems to be preferable at first glance; however, how do we know what the reality is? As shown by the names and lifestyles of characters such as Twinkleton and Crisparkle, and by the ensuing depiction of Tartar's living room, we should note the deliberate emphasis placed on aspects, such as their brightness, flawlessness, soundness and well-ordered character.

Mr. Tartar's chambers were the nearest, the cleanest, and the best ordered chambers ever seen under the sun, moon, and stars. The floors were scrubbed to that extent, that you might have supposed the London blacks emancipated for ever, and gone out of the land for good....no speck, nor spot, nor spatter soiled the purity of any of Mr. Tartar's household gods, large, small, or middle-sized'. (188)

Once such magnificence passes a certain degree, it results in a certain sense of incongruity. It is believed that black absorbs all colours, while white reflects them. Similarly, Jasper's interior world, which has engulfed his own surface world completely and aimed to incorporate the existence of Neville as well,

is purely black, while the attributes of Crisparkle and his fellows could be deemed white. They honour the peaceful world of order and routine above all and disdain anything that disturbs or stains that harmony even slightly; just as a polished metal surface reflects everything and absorbs nothing, the interior of such people engenders a feeling of stubbornness that rejects everything foreign. Like Jasper's black world, their white world hardly seems one that could bring happiness. The declaration of war against Jasper by those on the side of good, ultimately, rather than protecting a defenceless Neville and Rosa from Jasper's evil desires, seems to suggest a strong will to try to eliminate the darkness that is unfavourable to the world in which they believe.

However, one convincing interpretation is that, according to Dickens's conception, he was preparing a scenario wherein Neville would chase Jasper up to the top of the cathedral tower, where he would ultimately fall to his death. If this were the case, it would mean that although Neville aspired to live in the surface world, he ultimately never reaches it, which could be tied in with Jasper's figure, who once (presumably) expected much from an outward life as the choirmaster of Cloisterham but, being unable to adapt, abandoned this life to wander in the unknown darkness and was cast into Hell.

In the depth of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, and oftenest at midnight, those dark receptacles are flung wide open.³

While the above passage was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the picture of 'a tomb and a dungeon' closely resembles the gloomy scene witnessed by Jasper when, accompanied by Durdles, he stepped into the underground crypt below the cathedral. Jasper may be an extraordinary villain, but it does not seem that Dickens would have been satisfied if Jasper were to be condemned and eliminated as a unique case by the power of good. It is no mystery that, like Hawthorne, Dickens considered that darkness and chaos were, in fact, present in all of us and that Jasper-like elements might simply be waiting for the opportunity to express themselves.

If we accept the testimony of Dickens's biographer John Forster that 'the originality of [the story] was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close,... The last chapters were to be written in the condemned cell, to which his wickedness, all elaborately elicited from him, as if told of another, had brought him'⁴, the finale of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* would have taken the form of a confession delivered by Jasper, arrested and confined to a cell. It is ironic that a character that abhorred and attempted to escape from the closed society of Cloisterham should end his days in such a confined space, but even if he were to be physically restrained, his journey in the darkness

NOTES

All page references are to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Oxford World's Classics paperback, 2009).

1. Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 235.
2. Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), pp. 75-76.
3. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Twice-Told Tales* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), p. 238.
4. John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872-4): vol3, pp.425-426.