CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

In July, 1869, Dickens writes to his friend, John Forster of his idea for a new novel:

What should you think of the idea of a story beginning in this way?—Two people, boy and girl, or very young, going apart from one another, pledged to be married after many years—at the end of the book. The interest to arise out of the tracing of their separate ways, and the impossibility of telling what will be done with that impending fate. (Forster, 1874: 247)

The novel was to include a 'whodunit' element. In *Bleak House* (1853), Dickens had learned to play detective through his Inspector Bucket. From what Dickens had been reading and editing, he had been increasingly "drawn towards the secret that excites curiosity and to the game of hide and seek with the reader who tried to anticipate the solution of the secret." (Lang,1910: 81) This, coupled with the success of his friend, Wilkie Collins, with *The Moonstone* (1868), (considered the first full-fledged English detective novel), made a mystery project a natural choice for Dickens.

As to the mysterious element, Forster recollects in his *The Life of Dickens* (1874), the story was to include "that of the murder of a nephew by his uncle." (Forster, 1874: 246)

Dickens was writing serially at this time and the first of three monthly installments came out April 1. Public readings were draining his strength, and in his most recent, he had shown signs of infirmity. On June 9, 1870, Dickens worked later than usual, pouring himself into his invention. He suffered a paralyzing stroke and died, leaving *Drood* exactly half finished. Three further installments were released posthumously. The story is summarized as follows:

John Jasper, choirmaster of Cloisterham, has been taking opium 'for a pain.' His nephew, Edwin Drood, is soon to marry a delicate beauty named Rosa Budd (through an

arrangement by the pair's now-deceased fathers). The reader meets the colorful townspeople; there is the Mayor, Thomas Sapsea, Auctioneer by profession. Rev. Septimus Crisparkle, the Minor Canon of Cloisterham cathedral. Mr. Tope, its verger. Miss Twinkleton, the headmistress of the girls' seminary. Mr. Grewgious is Rosa's guardian who comes down from London time to time to check on his ward.

An overbearing philanthropist, Luke Honeythunder, has imposed on the town his wards, the Ceylonese twins, Neville and Helena Landless. Neville shows an admiration for Rosa which sets him and Edwin against each other, though Rosa and Edwin do not seem to have the appropriate matrimonial feelings for each other that would ordinarily occasion a proposal. Adding to this is Edwin's doting uncle, Jasper, who grows as a sort of unuttered threat in the insidious manner of his own regard of Rosa.

Jasper, Neville and Edwin meet in Jasper's rooms on Christmas Eve. Edwin and Neville agree to go for a walk. A storm strikes. In the morning, Edwin has disappeared; Neville is detained halfway to London and Jasper is left to play the distraught relative who devotes himself to the discovery of the murderer.

Time passes. A new character is introduced, a young, dashing, retired naval officer, Mr. Tartar. Tartar enchants Rosa. Neville is put under the custody of Crisparkle who himself seems increasingly drawn to Neville's sister, Helena. Jasper frightens Rosa with his advances and flushes her out of Cloisterham, to Grewgious, ultimately to lodge at the house of a Mrs. Billickin. Finally, a stranger moves to Cloisterham, a white haired idler by the name of Dick Datchery who appears to be spying on the town.

Dickens was no sooner buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey than 'droodologists' set to work attempting to solve the unfinished book. Notables like Father Brown's G.K. Chesterton and Sherlock Holmes's Sir Arthur Conan Doyle applied their sleuthing skills. No one could offer anything more than conjecture.

If writers weren't advancing solutions, they were offering sequels. Examples include, *Watched By The Dead* R. A. Proctor (1887), Felix Aylmer's *The Drood Case* (1965), and most recently Dan Simmons's bestselling *Drood* (2009).

The consensus of scholarship tends widely to the view that Jasper strangled Drood with his scarf and hid the body motivated by jealousy for Rosa.

Such is the fascination with finding a 'solution' to *Drood* that ideas of theme have often seemed secondary. Yet taking a theme – based approach to the novel has born more fruit. When considered, themes of repression and dissociation take primary focus.

"Whether people should repress or act out/give in to their desires and animal impulses is a theme which Dickens anticipates in his remarkable novel. Jasper's one relief is opium. Unfortunately, by 'harmlessly' acting out his darkest desire in fantasy— strangling Edwin— Jasper inures himself to the idea of committing the deed in reality. Dickens suggests that opium smoking, too, especially when in the transitional (glazed eyes) state—half-awake, half-dreaming— unshackles the devil within Jasper and when in opium's grip he becomes, and considers himself to be, a wholly different person—the precursor of Dr Jekyll's Mr. Hyde—a man ruled by dark, animal passions." (Dickens-Themes, 2009)

This theory, typified above by Terry Coverley, has become the standard interpretation. Dickens' friend, Wilkie Collins, had only a year before found success with *The Moonstone* (1868), in which a jewel is stolen by a man while in a drug-transfixed state, and who is completely unaware of his crime in his waking state.

Indeed, *Drood* opens in an opium den and almost everything in the book is cast with a strange split-personality as we will see. The modern trend is to expect *Drood* to have a dissociative angle. John Forster relates that Jasper's confession was to be told "as if by another man." (Forster,1874: 243) From this, most modern scholars think the originality in the denouement was to have been achieved in Jasper's altered state somehow.

However, when one reads the novel, one notices a number of things that are unaccounted for by Coverley's theme and by the theories other authors.

1.2 Identification, Limitation, and Formulation of Problems

1.2.1 Identification of problems

The theme of dissociation in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is too narrow to encompass patterns /devices that would point beyond the apparent dissociation.

1.2.2 Limitation of Problems

To clarify this problem, this research focuses on revealing three patterns/devices that are either unnoticed or neglected: astronomical references, allusion, and symbolism.

1.2.3 Formulation of Problems

Specifically, how do the patterns point to an alternative theme? Is there evidence of intention by Dickens that he used these patterns to embed an ulterior theme?

1.3 Objective of Study

By accumulating data resulting from an exhaustive text search, and grouping the results into astronomical references, literary allusions, and use of symbolism, the research will demonstrate that the patterns are empirical, ergo, they must be intentional, and that they point to an ulterior theme. The approach will employ secondary source documentation to bolster the idea that Dickens had all the ingredients in mind necessary to warrant the theory that he was using patterns to intentionally build an ulterior theme beyond one of personal dissociation.

1.4 Method of Study

The study was conducted through multiple close readings of the text, internet-accessible texts related to droodology, search engines for word appearance frequencies, Dickens' personal letters, and analysis of a facsimile of the manuscript,

1.5 Organization of Writing

This paper is divided into four chapters described briefly as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction. Included are a background to the study, method of study, and organization of writing.

Chapter Two: Theoretical framework. Discussion of dissociation. Devices employed by Dickens. Dickens' disposition.

Chapter Three: Research findings. Includes a description and interpretation of the data.

Chapter Four: Conclusion