CHAPTER I I
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The best work in the field of *Drood* comes from scholars who have taken a hermeneutical approach to the text. "The detective story constitutes an exacerbation of the metahermeneutic dimension and, on one level at least, any text giving particular importance to decoding in terms of a hermeneutic code presents itself as a detective story." (Prince, 1990: 238) The failing comes from the unanimous inability to divorce hermeneutical approach from the concept of the conventional detective genre.

Charles Forsyte, for example, penned his observations on *Drood* with the promising title, *The Decoding of Edwin Drood*. In it, He treats the text as a conventional detective genre, and declares it 'the first great psychological crime story in our literature.' (Forsyte, 1980: 9) This bold proclamation blinds him instantly. This stubborn presupposition causes inquirers to uncover tantalizing patterns only to stop short. They stand on the edge of discovery and then, lacking any suspicion of a radical, 'wholly other' dynamic, they fail to follow up on the questions they've generated.

Consider the following case in point:

"One way Dickens intensified and complicated the "mystery" of his story was by Shakesperean allusion and echo, especially from *Macbeth:* allusion and echo that call to mind patterns of ancient myth and ritual, sacrifice and redemption, good and evil. Such patterns are coded symbolically, culturally, and even semically in Dickens's *Edwin Drood* in ways that have not yet been fully apprehended, though some readers have sensed them."

"Another of the mysteries of *Edwin Drood* is the force of its pervasive Orientalism of fact, allusion, and analogy. On the one hand, the East is the source of Christian myth, especially in its most ancient and mysterious forms. On the other hand, the Orient, from Suez

to Singapore, haunted the commercial, cultural, and erotic imaginations of nineteenth-century Europe. How is this material encoded into the text? How does it help to structure the mystery, in the more obvious sense, into its more complex forms? In Dickens's fiction, especially the later works, the East is a mysterious direction out of which come mysterious forces and characters who have been affected in mysterious ways. Nowhere is this more so than in *Edwin Drood."*(Forsyte, 1980: 122-123)

The eloquence of the questions should not take the reader off the fact that the theory is incomplete. It is not enough to merely sense a deep contribution of allusion etc. The task is not to pose delicious questions, rather, the scholar's task is to explore the dissociation, the patterns and devices in order to form a more comprehensive explanation.

2.1 Dissociation

2.1.1 Dissociative details

Aside from the repressed character of dualistic Jasper, two characters do well to demonstrate the double nature of Cloisterham's entire citizenry.

"Miss Twinkleton has two distinct and separate phases of being." (Dickens,1870: 50) She has a "terrestrial and celestial globe scouring the earth and soaring through the skies in search of knowledge." (50) Dickens is careful to describe Miss Twinkleton in a way that unmistakably shares the duality of the town at large: "As in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism, there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each which pursues its own separate course." (49)

Crisparkle, who is, "lately coach upon the chief pagan high roads,'(55) demonstrates his split nature from the first, 'boxing at a looking glass hitting…while his radiant features teemed with innocence."(55)

In fact the whole book is split off from itself, the repressed 'otherness' smothered and cramped in closed quarters and a shrinking landscapes.

2.1.2 Extended to Cloisterham

The town's architecture is a mix of ancient and contemporary 'much as kindred jumbled notions have become incorporated into many of its citizen's minds."(Dickens, 1870: 29) This is a key passage. The pressured repression necessary for two natures to cohabitate is keenly felt in the way Dickens townsfolk resist change and suffer from increasing cramped and closed off terrains. "Poor strips of garden," (60) "walled off." (60)

The townsfolk "seem to suppose all changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come." (24)

Cloisterham is "a city of another and a bygone time." (24) Quite literally speaking, as shall be shown.

'We are an ancient city *and* an ecclesiastical city,' notes the Mayor. (29) Can we be certain what Mayor Sapsea intends isn't to be taken more literally than we can imagine?

And finally, "All things in it (Cloisterham) are of the past." (29)

"For sufficient reasons, a fictitious name must be bestowed upon the old cathedral town…Let it stand in these pages as Cloisterham." (31) The real city of Rochester and its cathedral was the actual location for Dickens story, yet he feels the need to substitute the name 'Cloister-ham.' A cloister is from, 'claustrum;' an enclosed religious order. Cloisters were designed in order to keep religious aspirants in, isolated from the world, and at the same time, keep outsiders out. This is in keeping with the Mayor's strongly felt conviction that " there never should be, never would be a railroad." (33)

2.1.3 Not far enough?

These cryptic passages are telling. Cloisterham is a city that, like a closed religious order, prefers to be left in isolation, resists change, is clearly connected to the ancient past, has kindred and jumbled notions in its collective mind of past and present mixed. The

repression begins with Jasper and his opium induced splitting – off, and then it extends to the town. Critics note this, and it is a clear fact, but the idea that the theme is generally man's psychical inner struggle of id and superego just doesn't explain further patterns presented in the following.

2.2 Devices

2.2.1 Astronomy in *Drood*

The sun figures especially prominently among the pages. Sun, moon, stars, solstice have been noticed by others. Dr. Terry Coverley on his *Themes of Charles Dickens* website has done a fine job sifting out. In a personal communication (June 10, 2011 email) Coverely recognizes the duplication of this author's work with his own work here and though he allows permission for his work to be quoted unaccredited to him, the order of his work merits independent recognition.

Splitting *Drood* into two parts-before and after midnight December 24 (just before the end of Chapter 15) - produces some interesting search results.

A search for 'sun' in Part One (ignoring all general, non-seasonal references) finds:

'Not only is the day waning, but the year. The low sun is fiery and yet cold', 'by the declining sun', 'reddened by the sunset', 'faced the wind at sunset', 'or at all events, when the sun is down', 'the westering sun bestowed bright glances on it…Neither wind nor sun, however, favored Staple Inn', 'the sun dipped in the river.'

'So the sun is in constant decline, and even in the final citation, in 'danger' of being extinguished.

In Part Two, however, after the Winter Solstice, the sun no longer sinks. There's not even one more sunset. Instead, the sun rises. Septimus Crisparkle 'was back again at sunrise'. (Coverley, 2010)

Coverley rightly notices "A close link is made between the sun and life and health:"

- ‘But no trace of Edwin Drood revisited the light of the sun.’
- ‘For still no trace of Edwin Drood revisited the light of the sun.’
- Crisparkle to Neville: “I want more light to shine upon you.”
- And again: “She has to draw you into the sunlight.”
- “They preferred air and light to Fever and the Plague.”

There are just 76 occurrences of ‘moonli’ (which finds both moonlight and moonlit) in the almost 4,000,000 words of Dickens’s other 14 novels. In Part One of Drood (less than 60,000 words) there are 22. And in Part Two, none at all! Moonlight vanishes entirely-replaced by stars and starlight (which, themselves, like ‘daylight’, don’t occur in Part One). The word ‘moon’ occurs 28 times in Part One and 29 times in total.”(Coverley, 2010)

Several of the characters have astronomical names as well. TWINKLEton, Billickin (which means ‘dipper’), Tope’s original name had been Peptune (Neptune) until just before the manuscript went to print. CriSPARKLE’s first name is Septimus, or Sept, the seventh child, born from his mother “like six little rush lights before him’ i.e., the seven planets.” (Dickens, 1870: 42)

An undeniable intention is evident, so when the reader realizes that it is on the very night of the winter solstice (coinciding with Christmas) that Drood disappears, he must scratch his head a little and ask what’s going on? More on the solstice later.

2.2.2 Allusion in *Drood*

“*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* had a major influence on *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* - helping to shape the imagery, characters and plot. Dickens draws a multitude of ironic parallels between the two stories and characters.” (Themes, 2010)

There is no Fairy Queen in any other Dickens work except *Drood*. Rosa has been ‘crowned by acclamation fairy queen of Miss Twinkleton’s establishment.”

Compare Honeythunder to “I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder.”

The Mystery of Edwin Drood	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Rosa has unwanted husband imposed on her	Hermia's unwanted husband imposed on her
Text contains a hidden story	Text contains a hidden acrostic
Grewgious manages Rosa's engagement	Egeus arranges Hermia's engagement
Drood goes missing on the winter solstice	Takes place on the summer solstice
Rosa is a 'fairy queen'	Titania is the fairy queen
Character named Helena	Character named Helena
Character named 'Honeythunder.	A description of 'sweet thunder'
Contains a play within a play-Bazzard's	Contains a play within a play-Bottom's
Anachronistic mingling of time/culture	Anachronistic mingling of time/culture
Events caused by neglect of nature worship	Events caused by neglect of nature worship

There is no question Dickens placed these strong currents in the text. The question is why? Few before have done much with the Shakespeare connection. Few have been so equipped to proceed. The clue offered by the allusions can be followed further and deduce from subsequent points in the texts why this is so.

2.2.3 Symbol: Shadow/ Birds/Sacrifice

John Jasper is the most two faced and villainous character in the book. He is an opium smoker in the throes of a mad crush.

- He casts a solitary shadow. (Dickens, 1870: 33)
- He lives in shadow. (33)
- He casts a shadow on the sundial. (34)
- His position is quite independent. Edwin remarks, "You hold such an independent position in this queer old place." (37)
- Jasper's rooms are "mostly in shadow even when the sun is shining brilliantly." (36)

In fact he is keeping a diary and writing a book about the town. The diary and his occupation as one who 'sings' suggest the threat he poses of exposing the town's suppressed side. In a key line that encapsulates the whole threat of Jasper, the Dean charges, "You are evidently going to write a book about us, Mr. Jasper," quoth the Dean. *To write a book about us, well! We are very ancient…perhaps you will call attention to our wrongs*." (Dickens, 1870: 60)

Additionally Jasper admits his suspicions to Edwin, (and it is Jasper's influence on Edwin that will cause Edwin's 'disappearance' later), he asks "How does our service sound to you? To me it often sounds quite devilish!" (41)

In the astronomical references, the town's hidden life can be said to 'revolve' around the sun. In associating Jasper with shadow, Dickens intends to cast Jasper as a menace. But a menace to what exactly? Being a murderer to young Drood hardly encompasses the larger framework developing through explication of the patterns.

Dickens uses other prominent symbolism. Rooks and other birds are especially telling. The birds are deeply connected to the town and especially its ancient cathedral.

"Whosoever has observed, that sedate and clerical bird, the rook, will some occult importance to the body politic and will retrace pretending to renounce connection." (Dickens 39) Has the town only pretended only to leave off the pagan ways and 'advance' along with modern society? . "Hoarse rooks hovering about the towers-hoarser and less distinct rooks in the stalls far beneath." (55) Rooks in the stalls far beneath connect the group to some hidden architectural feature underneath the cathedral.

An analysis of the manuscript, checking for the occurrences of the word 'rook' is revealing. It is a central symbolic image throughout the book. In the early chapters of the manuscript, the word 'crow' is used. Dickens must have decided to make the change to from 'crow' to 'rook' just prior to going to press. If there is no hidden symbolism, it is hard to

think such a minor detail as crow versus rook could warrant the extra effort. However, since the early chapters connect crows to clergy (and ultimately rooks to clergy of rook-like aspect), it would be necessary to make the change in order for rooks appearing in all subsequent passages to likewise be connected to clergy.

Mr. Grewgious attempts a poetic description of a lover seeking his beloved, likening it as to “a bird seeking its nest.” (108)

“Trench upon the nest.” (290) Billickin warns.

When Grewgious asks Rosa, “Perhaps you brought a bird that will sing-we shall set in on a spike and match our city birds?” (240) He is wondering if Jasper, the music master, has trailed her; he returns to the threat of the ‘spike’ i.e., the execution device of Jasper’s opium dream from the first scene.

The morning after Edwin’s disappearance, “the rooks hovered above them with hoarse cries…” (212) His disappearance has disturbed the nest and frightened the ‘rooks’. Who do the birds represent?

2.2.4 Dark, Un-English Doublespeak

Consider the auctioneer and Mayor of Cloisterham, Thomas Sapsea. Sapsea is described in ecclesiastical terms though he is not a religious leader. Sapsea "dresses at the dean… is mistaken for the dean (Dickens, 1870: 57) and is spoken to in the street as 'my lord and bishop.'(58) He seeks to be ecclesiastical.

He possesses "gravely strong hands as if he were going to confirm the individual." (58) 'Un-English!' is his favorite designation for a threat and once he makes his pronouncement the 'finger of scorn'(55) is upon the accused. 'Dark', 'Turkish', 'blacks' 'sun browned tramps' (57-58) foreigners-always symbolize threatening persons to the group.

Sapsea accuses Jasper of being both 'un-English' and 'dark.'

Consider Jasper's opium dream the book opens with. Jasper dreams of A Turkish sultan who leads a procession to witness the crucifixion of a trespasser. The assumption has always been that Jasper is wrestling with his guilt, contemplating his nephew's murder. But the facts don't really fit. Jasper blurts out his dismay that a grim spike co-exists with the cathedral tower. In the dream, Jasper can't reconcile the anachronistic presence of the church with the sultan's retinue. The grim spike is set up to impale dark trespassers.

In fact 'dark' people always represent the 'un-English,' the foreigners, the threat. Jasper has been taking opium for an agony-he is close to the heart of the town's secret and is in great fear. His darkness, symbolizes, as 'un-English' does, the threat to the town's secret.

Sapsea's monument to his late wife is sheer doublespeak. Sapsea invites Jasper to his house in order to warn him not to probe the town any further. He boasts to Jasper that he can sniff out 'foreigners.' 'un-English.' "I say Eskimo…and put my finger on it." (Dickens, 1870: 92) In other words, he is claiming that he can identify 'outside' threats. He toasts him with the threatening and combative, "when the French come over we shall meet them at Dover.' (92) That is to say, 'we will continue to repel any outside threat.'

He uses his late wife, Ethelinda Brobity as an example of one who earned ‘the finger of scorn.’

The whole purpose of ‘taking Jasper’s opinion’ of the monument’s inscription is to serve as a warning to give up his prying or to share in her fate:

“Is it likely that any human creature in his right senses would lay himself open to what I call the finger of scorn? (Sapsea is recounting the former example of the executed Ethelinda and posing the ultimatum to the investigative Jasper). Jasper shakes his head. Not in the least likely. (It’s the dynamic of the entire mystery!)”

“Miss Brobity revered mind when launched (she was launched) when I made my proposal (when I confronted her) she was able only to articulate two words, O Thou! (You! In other words, the shocked reaction that her murderer is upon her). Her limpid blue eyes were fixed upon me, her semi transparent hands were clasped (bound?) together, pallor overspread her aquiline features (bird-like for the brief ‘flight’) and though encouraged to proceed (repent) she never did proceed a word further (dead.) “(Dickens, 1870: 60)

Sapsea takes Jasper’s opinion in order to ‘feel Jasper out’ and to give an express warning. (Sapsea ‘lets Jasper off for the present.’) When the reader begins to develop an ear for such passages and such interactions between characters, the book’s deeper theme begins to open. The monument reads: ‘Stranger pause and ask Thyself the question: canst thou do likewise? If not, with a blush retire.’ (Be warned or else.) (Dickens, 1870: 61)

The town’s hidden life is being encroached upon. Sapsea said there never should be and never would be a railroad. The poor strips of garden, walled off. Jasper is poking around writing a book.

2.3 Disposition

2.3.1 ‘Curious new idea’

Was Dickens of the disposition to attempt an embedded, playfully secret theme ‘underneath’ the apparent story line in *Drood*?

After presenting his friend with his initial ideas for his new novel, he again wrote to Forster in a letter of August 6, 1869: "I laid aside the fancy I told you of, and have a very curious and new idea for my new story. Not a communicable idea (or the interest of the book would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work." (Forster, 1874: 240)

“It appears that this romance gave its author more trouble than any of his former novels; he revised and corrected his work continually, and sometimes entirely remodeled his sentences.” (Nicol, 1915: 212)

Dickens’ co-editor of *All The Year Round* recounted to a friend that Dickens had altered *Drood*’s plot “in the midst of serial publication and found himself hopelessly entangled in a maze of which he could not find the issue.” (Cuming, 1910: 45)

At the same time, however, Dickens made ambiguous remarks such as in this incident, remembered by Dickens’s daughter, Madame Perugini:

“One day my aunt, Miss Hogarth, being with me, I asked her if she knew anything more definite than I did as to how the ending was to be brought about. For I should explain that when my father was unusually reticent we seldom, if ever, attempted to break his silence by remarks or hints that might lead him to suppose that we were anxious to learn what he had no doubt good reason for desiring to keep from us.

She told me that shortly before my father’s death, and after he had been speaking of some difficulty he was in with his work, without explaining what it was, she found it impossible to refrain from asking him, ‘I hope you haven’t really killed poor Edwin Drood?’ To which he gravely replied, “I call my book *The Mystery*, not *The History*, of *Edwin Drood*.” And that was all he would answer. My aunt could not make out from the reply or

from his manner of giving it, whether he wished to convey that the mystery was to remain a mystery forever… (Purugini, 1891: 24)

2.3.2 Dickens' sense of irony in history

Michael Hollington in *Dickens and the Grotesque* looks at the history book Dickens wrote, *A Child's History of England,* and notes, "Dickens sense of history is frequently shot through with a sense of irony." Hollington notes instances of this in *Bleak House*:

But of course *Bleak House,* the novel that Dickens was in the process of writing, shows how many Druids are operating now, in the legal and political spheres, for instance, and how many magic circles they describe, so that the streets of London offer 'a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together.' (Hollington, 1993: 98)

In *The Uncommercial Traveler*, characters reveal their barbarism through association with the practices of 'the good old days.'

Why, a parity of practice would bring back the plague in two summers, and the Druids in a century. (Dickens, 1841: 346)

So the question is, did Dickens have it in his mind to concern *Drood* with a town that suffers from dissociation and is change - resistant and preoccupied with astronomy because it has only 'pretended to renounce a connection' with the past, that is, incredibly, still persists in pre-Christian religious practices? This issue is at the crux of the issue against the limited theory of a dissociative, suppression psychodynamic.

Dickens had been editing his magazine, *Household Words*, and a friend of his, Percy Leigh, submitted an article containing an idea that 'charmed' Dickens:

"Was it in the good old times that Harold fell at Hastings, and William the Conqueror enslaved England? Were those blissful years the ages of monkery; of Odo and Dunstan, bearding monarchs and branding queens? Of Danish ravage and slaughter? Or were they

those of the Saxon Heptarchy, and the worship of Thor and Odin? Of the advent of Hengist and Horsa? Of British subjugation by the Romans? Or, lastly, must we go back to the Ancient Britons, Druidism, and human sacrifices; and say that those were the real, unadulterated, genuine, good old times when the true-blue natives of this island went naked, painted with woad? ' (Leigh,1850: 33)

The short piece tells of a Mr. Blenkinsop, an alderman who stubbornly resists all change in preference for the 'good old times' gets drunk and is confronted by a statue in the town park about the implications of holding such a misplaced reverence for history. The talking effigy takes Blenkinsop all the way back to Druidism and human sacrifices as the comical, logical conclusion to adhering to 'the good old times.'

Dickens' read the short story and wrote to Leigh in a March 10, 1850 letter, that, your moral that the real old times are the oldest times is charming." (House, 2005: 84)

When the reader realizes what these patterns are amounting to, the theme of the book emerges, and passages that were once taken for mere Dickensian hyperbole are reinterpreted as literal.

The town was "once possibly known to the Druids by another name and a name, more or less in the course of many centuries can be of little moment to its dusty chronicles." (Dickens, 1870: 24)

2.3.3 Dickens' knowledge of Druidism in *Drood*

Lauriat Lane's work typifies the sort of missed opportunities that plague *Drood* scholarship. The best work builds to raise tantalizing questions – but never seeks to answer them. Lane, reviewing works by Forsyte and Garfield, comments on what these authors have sensed. "To take just one example of such complex codings, why should the sacrificial victim, Edwin Drood, who was going out "to wake up Egypt," have as his first name that of an early Northumbrian king converted to Christianity but later overthrown and killed by the

still pagan Mercians and as his last name one that combines Druid, a pre-Christian priesthood, with Rood, the Anglo-Saxon Cross?" (Lane, 1982: 124) Why indeed! Edwin Drood's name was originally to have been 'James Wakefield' until Dickens struck out on his 'new, curious idea.' It evidences intention and scholars must ask why Dickens chose to use the name of a pagan king who becomes a Christian convert only to end up killed by pagan enemies. Again, it is not enough for scholars to merely ask questions that their scholarship has raised. Lane has raised a question only to decline an attempt to answer it. The entire history of droodology demonstrates this woeful neglect.

It would be helpful to prove what Dickens knew about Druids and that he believed they performed human sacrifice. As it happens, he leaves a record. In *A Child's History of England*, Dickens writes "The Britons had a strange and terrible religion, called the Religion of the Druids. [It seems] to have mixed up the worship of serpents, and of the sun and the moon… most of its ceremonies were kept secret by the priests, the Druids." (Dickens, 1845: 44) But it is certain that the Druidic ceremonies included the sacrifice of human victims." (17)

Where does Edwin Drood stand in the matter? Consider what Dickens knew of Druidism from his *A Child's History of England*:

"They met together in dark woods, which they called Sacred Groves, and there they instructed, in their mysterious arts, young men who came to them as pupils, and who sometimes stayed with them as long as twenty years." Dickens repeats the clause in the next paragraph, "and their pupils who stayed with them twenty years." (39)

Edwin Drood is twenty years old when the reader meets him. This is not coincidental, especially when one considers that the protagonist' name was only late changed to Drood (dru-id).

Dickens is quick to reassure in *Child's History*, 'But it is pleasant to think that there are no Druids, NOW (sic), who go on that way-and, of course, there is nothing of the kind, anywhere."