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Author(s): Robert Tracy

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"Opium Is the True Hero of the Tale": De Quincey, Dickens, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

Robert Tracy

Writing about Jasper's opium dreams in The Mystery of Edwin Drood, *Dickens turned for information about the nature of the opium experience to Thomas De Quincey's* Confessions of an English Opium-Eater. *There he found descriptions of De Quincey's elaborate opium dreams, which underlie Jasper's repeatedly induced dream about a journey among great heights and depths with a doomed fellow-traveler, presumably his way of imagining in anticipation the murder of Edwin Drood. In the* Confessions *Dickens also found opium associated with the Orient and with violent death, a juxtaposition he employs in the unfinished novel. In portraying Jasper rehearsing and savoring his dream of murdering Drood, and later threatening to destroy Neville Landless by proving him to be Drood's murderer, Dickens also draws on De Quincey's essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," which invokes a theory of the aesthetic murder that applies to Jasper, a musician and would-be artist in crime.*

> "All opium-eaters are tainted with the infirmity of leaving works unfinished"
> —De Quincey, "Coleridge and Opium-Eating" (1845)

In the opening paragraph of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens lets us experience an awakening from an opium dream. A confused consciousness, at this stage without name or context, is hovering midway between *Arabian*

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Nights visions induced by the drug, and the intrusive recollection of a Gothic cathedral tower. The dreamer is somehow merging images of barbaric Oriental splendor with the ancient stones of an English cathedral city, so much so that the Sultan's guards seem about to impale "a horde of Turkish robbers" on a finial at a corner of the cathedral's square tower. There are flashing scimitars. "Thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers," followed by "white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colors, and infinite in numbers and attendants." But still that disturbing tower "rises in the background, *where it cannot be* [italics mine], and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike." Then the awakening opium dreamer begins to recognize that spike for what it is, the top of a bedpost. His "scattered consciousness has . . . fantastically pieced itself together" into this vision of exotica, opulence, and punishment, an epilogue to the drug-induced dream he has entertained.

As his consciousness begins to reassemble itself more conventionally, he recognizes that he is sprawled across a broken bedstead in an opium den and it is dawn. He has smoked five pipefuls since midnight, and vaguely accepts another from the woman who keeps the den and prepares the opium. She has already inhaled "much of its contents," and presumably weakened its hallucinatory potential. Her client examines her, and then the two other inhabitants of the den—a Lascar and a "Chinaman"—listening to their mutterings and reassuring himself that all three are " 'Unintelligible.' " His own visions have apparently not penetrated into theirs; they cannot have shared them or repeat anything he might have said. But he is not quite free of the drug yet. As he scrutinizes the "spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of" the opium woman's "face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky, some contagion in them seizes upon him," and he too begins to tremble, so much so that he has to sit down "on a lean arm-chair by the hearth—placed there, perhaps, for such emergencies—and to sit in it, holding tight, until he has got the better of this unclean spirit of imitation" (7–10; ch. 1).

Dickens, we know, visited a similar opium den, escorted by two police officers, when preparing to write this chapter (Johnson 2: 1113). There he noted the clientele, the generally sordid atmosphere, the proprietress's habit of making pipes out of penny ink-bottles, and no doubt this emergency chair, suggesting that the use of opium was often succeeded by such spasmodic jerkings and tremblings. When the chapter ends "That same afternoon," the dreamer, still unnamed, becomes "a jaded traveller" before whom "the massive grey square tower of an old Cathedral rises." He hurriedly takes his place among members of the cathedral choir robing for Evensong (11; ch. 1).

Dickens's phrase, "the jaded traveller," reminds us that the opium dreamer has been on a journey much longer, much stranger, and certainly more emotionally exhausting, than the railroad and omnibus journey between London

and Cloisterham, the location of the square-towered cathedral that draws on Dickens's intimate acquaintance with Rochester Cathedral. Early in the second chapter, we learn that the opium dreamer/jaded traveler is John Jasper, and that he may not have the constitution needed for the frequent use of opium. Though he reached the cathedral in time for Evensong, the verger later reports that Jasper was '' 'took a little poorly' '' during the service, so short of breath '' 'when he came in [began to intone], that it distressed him mightily to get his notes out: which was perhaps the cause of his having a kind of fit on him after a little. His memory grew DAZED . . . and a dimness and giddiness crept over him as strange as ever I saw . . . he was very shivery.' '' Jasper soon insists that he is better, but less than an hour later he alarms his nephew by looking '' 'frightfully ill,' '' with '' 'a strange film' '' coming over his eyes; he admits that he has been '' 'taking opium for a pain—an agony—that sometimes overcomes me. The effects of the medicine steal over me like a blight or a cloud and pass. You see them in the act of passing' '' (18; ch. 2).

Dickens invents an opium dream and its processional aftermath to introduce us to John Jasper and to his preoccupations and fantasies, which will determine his behavior in the novel we are beginning to read. The dream is literature, not clinical observation. But Dickens does draw on contemporary medical ideas about the nature of the opium experience and its after-effects, and about the nature of dreaming and of hallucination. He owned *Human Physiology* (1835 edition) by his friend Dr. John Elliotson, and *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* (1827) and *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1840 edition) by Dr. Robert Macnish (*Letters* 4: 713, 725; Stonehouse 42, 77), books that examined the phenomena of dreaming, including drug-induced dreaming. David Paroissien has persuasively argued that Dickens drew on *The Philosophy of Sleep* in *Oliver Twist* to describe Oliver's half-waking visions of Fagin with his box of jewels and Fagin and Monks outside the window (*Oliver Twist*, chs. 9, 35; Paroissien 101, 217). *Human Physiology* and *The Philosophy of Sleep* both provide Dickens with his explanation of Miss Twinkelton's ''two distinct and separate phases of being'' (24; ch. 3), which seems to prepare us for Jasper's dual nature: the anecdote of the Irish porter who, when drunk, ''left a parcel at the wrong house, and when sober could not recollect what he had done with it; but the next time he got drunk, he recollected where he had left it, and went and recovered it'' (*Philosophy of Sleep* 82; *Human Physiology* 646).

Elliotson has sections on Sleep, Dreaming, ''Sleep-Waking,'' and Mesmerism, all of them suggestive in the context of *Edwin Drood*. He quotes Franz Joseph Gall, the founder of phrenology, on the ability of hallucinogens or illness to alter personality and behavior, in terms that suggest the effects that the use of opium combined with his obsessive love for Rosa Bud have on Jasper: ''How often in intoxication, hysterical and hypochondriacal attacks,

convulsions, fevers, insanity, *under violent emotions*, after long fasting, *through the effects of such poisons as opium*, hemlock, belladonna, are we not in some measure transformed into *perfectly different beings*, for instance into poets, actors, &c.?'' (Elliotson 677; italics mine). Opium, Elliotson writes, ''excites the intellect and feelings; gives headach [sic]; and renders noise intolerable'' (609). Jasper's opium dream invokes murder and lust. It is presumably the opium that makes the singing of the cathedral choir seem to him '' 'quite devilish,' '' while Edwin Drood finds it '' 'Beautiful! Quite celestial!' '' (19; ch. 2). Macnish declares that ''of all dreams, there are none which, for unlimited wildness, equal those produced by narcotics'' (*Philosophy of Sleep* 95). ''Opium acts differently on different constitutions,'' Macnish declares;

> While it disposes some to calm, it arouses others to fury. Whatever passion predominates at the time, it increases; whether it be love, or hatred, or revenge, or benevolence. Lord Kames . . . speaks of the fanatical Faquirs, who, when excited by this drug, have been known, with poisoned daggers, to assail and butcher every European whom they could overcome. . . . The Malays are strongly addicted to opium. When violently aroused by it, they sometimes perform what is called *Running-a-Muck*, which consists of rushing out in a state of phrensied excitement, heightened by fanaticism, and murdering everyone who comes in their way. (*Anatomy of Drunkenness* 49–50)

Macnish provides Dickens with links between the use of opium and an eagerness to kill, and also with links between opium and visions of oriental splendor. He imagines the ''halo of poetic thought'' by which opium allows ''the luxurious and opulent mussulman'' to penetrate ''the veil which shades the world of fancy'' and see ''palaces and temples in the clouds; or the Paradise of Mahomet, with its houris and bowers.'' Macnish also warns that prolonged use of opium leads to visions of ''horror and disgust . . . Frightful dreams,'' and general physical and mental disintegration (*Anatomy of Drunkenness* 51–53).

But Dickens's ideas about opium and its effects come primarily from literary rather than scientific sources. Among nineteenth-century writers and artists, opium and the visions it could provide had achieved considerable prestige. Coleridge had famously taken opium before he fell asleep reading about China in *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, thereby providing method and matter for the vision that he tried to record in ''Kubla Khan.'' Elliotson even prints Coleridge's note describing that experience, and uses it as an example of how ''in a dream certain faculties occasionally display more energy than in the waking state.'' He also cites La Fontaine's producing ''admirable verses,'' Alexander the Great's planning a battle, and Condillac's solving ''difficult problems'' while dreaming (615).

Elliotson suggests that dreams are often more intense than waking experience, and quotes with approval Charles Wheatstone's statement, that in dreams we may "perform the most ruthless crime without compunction, and see what in our waking hours would cause us unmitigated grief, without the smallest feeling of sorrow" (Elliotson 621). Emotions, among them "sexual desire, terror, rage," rather than intellect usually shape dreams. "The dreams of drunkenness and under the influence of narcotics are the most extravagant" (624). Elliotson's examples suggest certain affinities between Jasper's dreaming and dreams recorded in contemporary medical literature, but there is a major difference: Jasper seems able to control the content of his favorite dream, at least until he has actually committed the murder. The dream is apparently less tractable and satisfactory afterwards, which he blames on his own inability to mix the drug as the opium woman does. Elliotson never suggests that dreams can be bespoke.

In Wilkie Collins, Dickens had a close friend who was a potential source of information about the effects of opium. A frequent user of opium in its liquid form, laudanum, and a student of its effects, Collins had recently given the drug a major role in *his* mystery novel, *The Moonstone* (1868), drawing on Elliotson's book as well as his own experience, and in reading *The Moonstone* (440–41) Dickens had already encountered Elliotson's and Macnish's drunken porter. Elliotson could have added Collins to his list of men who had produced art or solved problems while dreaming: Collins sometimes read with surprise whole chapters of a novel in progress which he had written under the influence of laudanum (Hayter 259–60).

But Collins uses opium sparingly in his fiction, and does not provide fantastic visions of the sort Jasper demanded. In *The Moonstone* the opium is a plot device: Franklin Blake, unaware that he has been given laudanum, walks in his sleep and takes the gem, intending to hide it in a safer place. Like the drunken porter, he needs a second dose to reenact his movements. Ezra Jennings, who uses laudanum to suppress emotional and physical pain, persuades Blake to try that second dose by quoting Elliotson and Macnish, and recommends that he read De Quincey's *Confessions* for reassurance: opium will do him no harm (442)! Blake does not dream; we get only a brief glimpse of Jennings's own visions:

> a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday's opium, pursuing me though a series of frightful dreams. At one time I was whirling through empty space with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never see again, rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness and grinned at me. (*Moonstone* 447)

Of Collins's own visions we know little. He sometimes had frightening hallucinations while awake or awakening, including "a reptile of the pre-Adamic

period . . . ghosts trying to push him down . . . a green woman with teeth like tusks,'' but ''none of his nightmares seem to have been recorded'' (Hayter 260–61).

Dickens himself tried laudanum, ''the only thing that has done me good,'' in combating exhaustion, sleeplessness, and a persistent cough in March 1868, on his strenuous American reading tour (*Letters* 12: 85; CD to Mary Dickens, 29/3/68). Less than a month before his death, about when he was writing Jasper's hints about the content of his opium dreams in chapter 23, Dickens was taking laudanum again, for ''a neuralgic affection of the foot'' which ''has caused me great pain.'' ''Last night I got a good night's rest under the influence of Laudanum but it hangs about me very heavily today,'' he told Georgina Hogarth (12 May 1870), in what would be his last letter to her (*Letters* 12: 524).

Jasper is an artist with a sensitive and highly developed imagination, and his dreams reflect that. To develop them, Dickens needed something more than medical books, which hardly penetrated the world of dreams, or any hints Collins might have supplied. The fullest and most accessible account of opium, its effects, and the visions it offered that was available to Dickens was Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821, revised 1856). In discussing the effects of opium, Elliotson and Macnish often rely on or quote the *Confessions* and seem at time almost to accept them as recording scientific investigations, thus entitling Dickens to do the same. The *Confessions* gave him entry into the imaginative world of the opium-eater, with its fantastic glimpses of wild landscapes, vast structures, and haunting forms. De Quincey celebrates ''just, subtle, and mighty opium'' for the physical, mental, and moral comfort it brings, and especially for the splendid visions it supplies:

> thou buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles—beyond the splendour of Babylon and Hekatómpylos: and 'from the anarchy of dreaming sleep,' callest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties . . . thou hast the keys of Paradise, oh, just, subtle, and mighty opium! (2: 51)

But to describe a dream, drug-induced or not, is inevitably to impose a certain coherence upon it. De Quincey also came to recognize that the drug had destroyed his powers of concentration and, though he eventually claims to have abandoned its use, he is still troubled by terrifying dreams and a powerful sense of guilt.

Only Christopher Herbert and Wendy Jacobson seem to have linked De Quincey's *Confessions* to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, but neither of them explores the connection very fully. Dickens ''deeply admired'' De Quincey (Johnson 2: 1131) and owned a thirteen-volume set of his works (Stonehouse

27). When James T. Fields, De Quincey's American publisher, visited Gad's Hill in May 1869, Dickens mentioned De Quincey's works as ''among certain books of which [he] liked to talk during his walks'' (Fields 237–38). Fields visited Jasper's opium den with Dickens, escorted by Chief Inspector Field, the model for Inspector Bucket, and noted the haggard proprietress, her '' 'Ye'll pay up according, deary, won't ye?' '' refrain, and the pipe made of a penny ink-bottle (Fields 202). On 10 October, back at Gad's Hill, Dickens invited Fields to his study and read him the first chapters of *Edwin Drood* (Fields 228), which Fields was to publish in the United States.

When Dickens selected Cloisterham as the ''fictitious name'' (22; ch. 3) for his cathedral city, he probably recalled De Quincey's novel *Klosterheim: or, the Masque* (1832), which also features a large and mysterious Gothic building. De Quincey's presence in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is evident when Jasper listens to the opium woman's mutterings in that first chapter. Jasper considers his own splendid *Arabian Nights* visions to be beyond the woman's stunted imaginative capacity. '' 'What visions can *she* have?' '' he wonders. '' 'Visions of many butchers' shops, and public-houses, and much credit? Of an increase of hideous customers, and this horrible bedstead set upright again, and this horrible court swept clean? What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that!' '' (10; ch. 1).

Jasper clearly shares De Quincey's reiterated belief that ''If a man 'whose talk is of oxen' should become an Opium-eater, the probability is, that (if he is not too dull to dream at all)—he will dream about oxen'' (2:12). In the ''Introductory Notice'' to ''*Suspiria de Profundis*'' (''Sighs from the Depths,'' 1845), the first sequel to the *Confessions*, De Quincey declares that comparatively few opium-eaters possess

> this faculty of dreaming splendidly. . . . He whose talk is of oxen, will probably dream of oxen: and the condition of human life, which yokes so vast a majority to a daily experience incompatible with much elevation of thought, oftentimes neutralizes the tone of grandeur in the reproductive faculty of dreaming, even for those whose minds are populous with solemn imagery. Habitually to dream magnificently, a man must have a constitutional determination to reverie.
> (15: 129–30)

Jasper considers himself to be, like De Quincey, one of those comparatively rare beings for whom ''getting and spending'' have not destroyed the ability to evoke visions. He is well placed, by De Quincey's standards, to develop that ability. He lives a quiet life, '' 'No whirl and uproar around me, no distracting commerce or calculation, no risk, no change of place, myself devoted to the art I pursue, my business my pleasure,' '' but then adds, '' 'I hate it. The cramped monotony of my existence grinds me away' '' (19; ch. 2). Lay Precentor at Cloisterham, he has a quasi-priestly function and a central

role in the solemn processions and liturgies of the Church of England, as performed with pomp and ceremony in a vast and beautiful Gothic cathedral, a situation that feeds his visions of imperial processions which somehow involve the cathedral tower.

We eventually learn that Jasper's *Arabian Nights* visions occur as a coda to the opium dream he repeatedly invokes. They are visions of grandeur and power, extravagant but in themselves probably harmless enough, though the reference to impalement suggests their source in some sense of guilt that anticipates punishment. When Jasper returns to the opium den in chapter 23, some six months after Drood's disappearance, we hear much more about the dreams he regularly went there to experience, and why he travels so far to induce them. We have already seen the opium woman in Cloisterham, where she has come on Jasper's track, aware that in his dreams he repeatedly threatens someone named "Ned," the name by which Jasper alone habitually addresses Edwin Drood (160–62; ch. 14). On Christmas Eve she encounters Drood, and warns him that "Ned" is in danger, but he fails to understand her warning. On that visit she has followed Jasper from London, concerned about his murderous threats, but loses him when he transfers from the train to the Cloisterham omnibus (264; ch. 23).

On his return visit to the opium den, Jasper reveals what he imagines when he smokes opium. The opulent vision of Sultan, dancing girls, and elephants only comes at the end of a session with the drug. At once a triumphal march and a procession to a place of punishment, it always follows his repeated and cherished dream. That dream, programmatically induced over and over when Jasper visits the opium den for the specific purpose of dreaming precisely *that* dream, consists of a phantasmagoric journey with a fellow-traveler, culminating in an intended attack on that traveler, whose name is Ned. When we finally hear more fully about this deliberately induced dream journey, we read it both as self-indulgence—Jasper takes great pleasure in it—and as a repeated rehearsing of his wish to murder Edwin Drood, in order to gain possession of Rosa Bud, Drood's fiancée. She too figures in the dream. " 'I loved you madly,' " Jasper tells Rosa six months after Drood's disappearance. " 'In the distasteful work of the day, in the wakeful misery of the night, girded by sordid realities, or wandering through Paradises and Hells of visions in which I rushed, carrying your image in my arms, I loved you madly' " (214; ch. 19). Dickens conveys the fragmentary nature of such dreams by never letting us fully experience Jasper's dream. He reveals parts of it in chapters 1, 19, and 23, and we must connect them. Dickens's separated and partial revelation of the dream's content reminds us of the difficulty of making opium's fantastic juxtapositions cohere, as in "Kubla Khan" Coleridge admits that he cannot adequately convey his visionary glimpses of the splendors of Xanadu.

When a beginner at opium, Jasper used to sing himself into his reveries, but as he became more used to it, he also became fixed on '' 'something [he was] going to do . . . ,' '' he tells the opium woman, when he returns to the den after Edwin Drood's disappearance, '' 'But had not quite determined to do. . . . Might or might not do.' '' Given such a fixation, such an intention, he asks her,

> 'Should you do it in your fancy, when you were lying here doing this?'
>
> She nods her head. 'Over and over again.'
>
> Just like me! I did it over and over again. I have done it hundreds of thousands of times in this room.'
>
> 'It's to be hoped that it was pleasant to do, deary.'
>
> It *was* pleasant to do!'
>
> He says this with a savage air, and a spring or start at her . . . he sinks into his former attitude.
>
> 'It was 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?' . . .
>
> 'Well; I have told you. I did it, here, hundreds and thousands of times. What do I say? I did it millions and billions of times. I did it so often, and through such vast expanses of time, that when it was really done, it seemed not worth the doing, it was done so soon.' (258–60; ch. 23)

Under the woman's careful questioning, Jasper reveals that this repeated dream journey was always the same journey, that he '' 'always took the same pleasure in harping on it.' '' Eventually it was a real journey that copied the dream journey. He never tired of dreaming the same journey, never sought a change. He came to the opium den only to dream that specific journey: '' 'When I could not bear my life, I came to get the relief, and I got it. It WAS one! It WAS one!' This repetition with extraordinary vehemence, and the snarl of a wolf'' (260–61; ch. 23). Then the opium woman asks about the fellow-traveler. '' 'To think,' he cries, 'how often fellow-traveller, and yet not know it! To think how many times he went the journey, and never saw the road!' '' Only after the dream-journey had been accomplished and the repeatedly imagined deed been imagined as done could '' 'the changes of colors and the great landscapes and glittering processions' '' begin; '' 'they couldn't begin till it was off my mind. I had no room till then for anything else.' ''

With professional skill, the woman talks him through his vision to reveal its details: a journey, a fellow-traveler, some action he does not put into words, and that she knows better than to try to get him to say. But he saw himself perform that unidentified action, and now sees it again: '' 'when it comes to be real at last, it is so short that it seems unreal for the first time.' '' It all happens too soon. '' 'This is a vision,' '' he declares. '' 'I shall sleep it

off. It has been too short and easy. I must have a better vision than this; this is the poorest of all. No struggle, no consciousness of peril, no entreaty—and yet I never saw *that* before. . . . Look what a poor, mean, miserable thing it is! *That* must be real. It's over!' " (261–63; ch. 23).

Jasper has cultivated and enjoyed an obsessive vision, presumably of enticing Edwin Drood to accompany him on a hazardous journey over deep abysses, and then destroying him. In a famous passage from his *Confessions*, De Quincey recalls Coleridge describing plates in Piranesi's *Dreams*, that is, his *Invenzioni Capric di Carceri* (1745, "Imaginary Prisons"):

> Some of them . . . represented vast Gothic halls. . . . Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a stair-case; and upon it, groping his way upward, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose, at least, that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher: on which again Piranesi is perceived, but this time standing on the very brink of the abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall.—With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams. In the early stage of my malady, the splendours of my dreams were indeed chiefly architectural: and I beheld such pomps of cities and palaces as was never yet beheld by the waking eye, unless in the clouds.
>
> (De Quincey 2: 68–69; the passage is almost identical in the 1856 version. No plate in *Carceri* quite conforms to this description.)

Dickens had remembered this passage when, in *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson experiences a similar dream during her illness, "when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned . . . by some obstruction, and labouring again" (555–56; ch. 35).

Since Jasper's journey is a hazardous one over abysses, it can hardly take place in the gentle landscape around Cloisterham/Rochester. Macnish suggests that, "if we lie awry, or if our feet slip over the side of the bed,"—Jasper lies across a broken bedstead when we first meet him (7; ch. 1)—"we often imagine ourselves standing upon the brink of a fearful precipice, or falling from its beetling summit into the abyss" (*Philosophy of Sleep* 56). My guess is that, like Piranesi's, the journey is imagined as taking place within and perhaps even on top of a great building, Cloisterham cathedral itself. Those required to pass long periods in a church or other large architectural space often evade boredom by imagining journeys among its upper reaches. A vast Gothic cathedral, with its staircases, intricately carved stonework, galleries, clerestory and access to the roof, offers the locale for such a journey, and for

its fatal ending. While the actual murder of Drood is likely to have been by strangulation, the cathedral is probably the site of Jasper's dream murder, and perhaps of his later capture, as the pursuit up a spiral staircase depicted in the cover design for the monthly numbers of *Edwin Drood* suggests. Jasper's interest in Durdles's keys to the cathedral and the destructive possibilities of quicklime hint that Drood's body may be concealed in the cathedral crypt or the adjacent graveyard.

Jasper's dream journey, with its depths and abysses, recalls De Quincey's description of Piranesi's *Carceri* and De Quincey's own obsessive recollections of vast buildings, dangerous staircases, and great heights. "I seemed every night to descend, not metaphorically, but literally to descend, into chasms and sunless abysses, depths below depths," De Quincey recalls; "The sense of space [was] powerfully affected. Buildings, landscapes, &c. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity" (De Quincey 2: 66–67; quoted by Macnish, *Philosophy of Sleep* 60).

In "The English Mail-Coach" (1849), his second sequel to the *Confessions*, De Quincey introduces this opium-eater's tendency to enlarge buildings until they seem to stretch to infinity. In that essay he develops another obsessive recollection, of being drugged and riding atop a speeding mail-coach carrying the great news of Wellington's victory at Waterloo through the night:

> Two hours after midnight we reached a mighty minster. Its gates, which rose to the clouds, were closed . . . silently they moved back upon their hinges; and at a flying gallop our equipage entered the grand aisle of the cathedral. Headlong was our pace; and at every altar, in the little chapels and oratories on the right hand and left of our course, the lamps, dying or sickening, kindled anew in sympathy with the secret word that was flying past. Forty leagues we might have run in the cathedral . . . when we saw before us the aerial galleries of the organ and the choir. Every pinnacle of the fret-work, every station of advantage amongst the traceries, was crested by white-robed choristers. . . . Vast sarcophagi rose on every side, having towers and turrets that, upon the limits of the central aisle, strode forward with haughty intrusion, then ran back with mighty shadows into answering recesses. (16: 446–48)

Can we recognize in this both the vastness of Cloisterham Cathedral and the oppression Jasper feels while officiating there? Could it not become in his bespoke vision the vast arena where a fatal accident is to be arranged? Whatever the effects of opium on an opium-eater's apprehension of architecture, De Quincey's fantastic description has permitted Jasper to imagine Cloisterham cathedral as vast and menacing in his dream, and Dickens to make it a kind of sinister presence in his novel as in Jasper's life.

De Quincey frequently combines hallucinogens, the Orient, and murder in a thematic cluster that Dickens has carried over into *Edwin Drood*. In the

Confessions he describes recurrent nightmares about a "ferocious looking Malay," who inexplicably came to his door at Grasmere, and to whom he gave some opium. "This Malay . . . fastened afterwards upon my dreams, and brought other Malays with him worse than himself, that ran 'a-muck' at me, and led me into a world of troubles"; he glosses " 'a-muck' " as "the frantic excesses committed by Malays who have taken opium" (De Quincey 2: 57–58). In May 1818 he reports that

> The Malay has been a fearful enemy for months. I have been every night, through his means, transported into Asiatic scenes . . . if I were compelled . . . to live in China, and among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. . . . Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. . . . I could sooner live with lunatics, [1856: "with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes"] . . . I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, . . . and assembled them together in China or Indostan. From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas: and was fixed, for centuries, at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brama through all the forests of Asia: Vishnu hated me: Seeva laid in wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. I was buried, for a thousand years, in stone coffins, with mummies and sphynxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.
>
> (2: 70–71; the passage is almost identical in the 1856 version)

Macnish quotes most of this long passage in *The Philosophy of Sleep* (95–97) as an example of "the effects produced by [opium] upon the imagination during sleep," giving Dickens a scientist's endorsement for De Quincey's dramatic accounts of opium-induced hallucinations. Rosa Bud succinctly echoes it with her hatred of " 'Arabs, and Turks, and Fellahs . . . Pyramids . . . Tiresome old burying-grounds! Isises, and Ibises, and Cheopses . . . Belzoni . . . dragged out by the legs, half choked with bats and dust' " (31; ch. 3).

Jasper's opium dream is also a mixture of terror and guilt, invariably ending in a march to punishment. Dickens connects Jasper's opium use with his murderous intentions and with Oriental references: the Landless twins are from Ceylon, Edwin is going to Egypt. Rosa is even addicted to Turkish Delight. Tartar's unusual name recalls De Quincey's famous essay, "Revolt of the Tartars" (1837). "John Chinaman" is the opium woman's rival and appears on the cover design for serial publication that Dickens instructed Charles Collins, and later Luke Fildes to draw. On that cover, the several vignettes hinting at details of the story are all sustained in the cloud of opium

fumes produced by the opium woman and "John Chinaman," puffing away and between them dreaming up the entire novel. Their presence suggests that *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is really, after all, an opium dream, albeit with apparently fatal consequences. As De Quincey says of his *Confessions*: "Not the opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale" (2: 74).

Aesthetic in his visions of the *Arabian Nights*, Jasper is equally so in imagining the murder he is to commit, and its setting. It is to be no sordid stabbing or clubbing, no brutal Bill Sikes murdering Nancy with a heavy club, no Jonas Chuzzlewit assaulting Montague Tigg with a stake torn from a fence, but an artist's performance, worthy of inclusion in De Quincey's two-part essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827, 1839). De Quincey imagines a "Society of Connoisseurs in Murder" (De Quincey 6:112), aesthetes of crime who scorn ordinary murders motivated by rage or greed but admire a murder committed with style, or as an end in itself. In an 1854 "Postscript" added to "On Murder," De Quincey describes the activities of one John Williams, something of a dandy in his personal style, "And, beyond a doubt, in that perilous little branch of business which was practiced by himself he might be regarded as the most aristocratic and fastidious of artists" (20: 43). In December 1811, not far from Jasper's opium den, in a neighborhood where "Lascars, Chinese, Moors, Negroes, were met at every step" (20: 41), Williams terrified London by murdering all four members of the Marr household, one of them a sleeping infant; twelve days later he murdered Mr. and Mrs. Williamson and their servant, near neighbors of the Marrs.

Williams was brutal enough; he smashed his victims' skulls with a hammer, then cut their throats. His motive was robbery. But De Quincey celebrates him as an artist in crime, attempting not so much the perfect crime as crimes that will become notorious for deliberately exterminating entire households. De Quincey insists that such a murderer will strike and strike again. "A murderer who is such by passion and by a wolfish craving for bloodshed as a mode of unnatural luxury cannot relapse into *inertia*," he argues; "Such a man . . . comes to crave the dangers and the hairbreadth escapes of his trade, as a condiment for seasoning the insipid monotonies of daily life" (20: 55). Jasper has used his murderous dream to offset " 'the cramped monotony of my existence' " (19; ch. 2). With Drood dead, we expect he will murder again; he threatens Landless, telling Rosa Bud that he can make Landless appear responsible for Drood's disappearance. Jasper kills Landless in many suggested solutions to the novel's mystery.

Williams had planned the Marr murders carefully. He and Marr had once been friends, had sailed to India together. De Quincey considers their later rivalry for Mrs. Marr the probable motive for the murders. Careful planning, a close relationship with the victim, sexual rivalry, and a real or imaginary

experience of the East, all played their part, as they do in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. De Quincey's sinister Malay was a "tiger-cat" (2: 57), and in the "Postscript" to "On Murder" he equates Williams's "tiger spirit" with "the murderous mind" and notes the murderer's "natural tiger character . . . the tiger's heart was masked by the most insinuating and snaky refinement" (20: 42–43). In Cloisterham Jasper is trusted and respected for his musical abilities. His murderous potential is masked, recognized only by the opium woman, who on Christmas Eve tries to warn Edwin Drood of his danger. Dickens waits until chapter 23 to show us Jasper's "savage air" as he remembers the deed he has repeatedly imagined, and his sudden "spring or start" at the opium woman as he does so, neatly endowing Jasper with Williams's "tiger spirit" and "wolfish craving for bloodshed."

Neville Landless admits to Crisparkle that he himself might have " 'a drop of what is tigerish in my blood,' " contracted somehow from the " 'inferior race' " among whom he has been brought up in Ceylon (64; ch. 7). After quarreling with Drood at Jasper's, Neville describes the encounter to Crisparkle and blames Drood for heating " 'that tigerish blood I told you of' " (80; ch. 8); Jasper has followed him and probably eavesdropped, for he echoes the phrase a few moments later, describing the quarrel to Crisparkle and adding, " 'There is something of the tiger in [Neville's] dark blood' " (80–81; ch. 8).

The Marrs' servant had been sent on an errand and so survived. When she returned and no one answered the bell, she became alarmed. As she knocked and rang, she heard someone breathing, and a furtive step inside the door. "What was the murderer's meaning in coming along the passage to the front door?" De Quincey asks;

> The meaning was this: Separately, as an individual, Mary was worth nothing at all to him. But, considered as a member of a household, she had this value, viz. that she, if caught and murdered, perfected and rounded the desolation of the house . . . The whole covey of victims was thus netted; the household ruin was thus full and orbicular. (20: 50)

De Quincey considers that for Williams the murder was aesthetically imperfect if any member of the household survived. He risked capture by delaying his escape in order to make his deed more notorious in the annals of crime by adding a final victim. This seems farfetched, but it is De Quincey's notion of how a murderer might think if he considered murder to be a fine art. In Williams's second murder, he lingers to search the house for other victims, in the same quest for perfection.

Jasper could have contrived any of a dozen ways to kill Edwin Drood, and as his trusted kinsman had plenty of opportunity to do so. The opium-induced rehearsals of the murder are thrilling to him, an exciting pleasure that may

partly have been a way of accustoming himself to the idea of killing. The imaginary murder is perhaps more important to him than its actual commission; it satisfies him aesthetically in a way that killing Drood could not.

De Quincey insists that Williams lingered at his second murder scene to find and kill a child he knew was asleep upstairs, to complete the household, but also to savor her terror and pleas for mercy. A lodger in the house saved the child, but the delay led to Williams's capture. ''To an epicure in murder such as Williams,'' De Quincey suggests, ''it would be taking away the very sting of the enjoyment if the poor child'' should die ''without fully apprehending the misery of the situation. . . . in a murder of pure voluptuousness, . . . where no hostile witness was to be removed, no extra booty to be gained, and no revenge to be gratified, it is clear that to hurry would be altogether to ruin.'' De Quincey defends himself against the charge that he is exaggerating or romanticizing Williams's ''pure fiendishness'' in a footnote, insisting that ''except for the luxurious purpose of basking and reveling in the anguish of dying despair, he had no motive at all . . . for attempting the murder of this young girl'' (20: 65). Is Jasper's tormenting Rosa while serving as her music teacher, and later beside the sundial in the Nuns' House garden, another luxurious ''basking and reveling'' in a terrified victim?

Jasper doesn't just want Drood dead. He wants to kill him in a certain way, and he wants his victim to know his murderer and to plead with him for his life—a feature of the dream, apparently, but not of the actual murder. '' 'It has been too short and easy,' '' he complains; '' '. . . No struggle, no consciousness of peril, no entreaty' '' (263; ch. 23). But the dream is not a very effective way of planning a crime. For Jasper, to do the deed is not enough. It must be done aesthetically, at Christmas, in or near a Christian church he hates as the scene of his dreary routine, and it must create a mystery that will long be discussed. If Drood's body had been found in Cloisterham Weir, instead of his watch and shirt-pin, he might have been considered the victim of a casual assault. Jasper wants him to be seen as the victim of determined malevolence. By arranging events in such a way that Drood seems to have been murdered by Neville Landless, Jasper would perfect his crime by making Landless a second victim, thus eliminating both of his rivals for Rosa. It is indeed murder as a fine art.

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