

## NOTES AND REVIEWS

### *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* De/Re/Encoded

As prose fiction, Leon Garfield's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and "Charles Forsythe"'s *The Decoding of Edwin Drood* are at the least harmless literary entertainments.<sup>1</sup> Each book completes in fiction Dickens's final, uncompleted prose romance. Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, however, because it is all Dickens, is already "complete" in one sense beyond any other completion, and ours for the reading. Yet, if not Dickens's *Edwin Drood*, such completions can nevertheless form part of our thinking about that work, as explicit or implicit commentary (Forsythe has a long critical introduction and a brief appendix). Moreover, they raise general critical issues.

*Edwin Drood* is as profoundly engrossing and moving in its own way as is any of Dickens's other, finished later fiction.<sup>2</sup> It also raises with melodramatic obviousness questions of the power of "intention" and "codes" or "conventions" to fix the identity, above all the structures, of any text and to dictate or at least direct our response to such an identity, such structures.<sup>3</sup> These questions once took—and often still take—older, simpler, less new-fangled forms: What did Dickens intend? Or: What does *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* say? Old or new, however, and even though a relatively short review such as this can only suggest the lines of inquiry they project, they are still the important questions: ". . . what are the codes and conventions—whether aesthetic or cultural—to which actual readers refer in trying to make sense of texts and to which actual authors refer in facilitating or complicating, or perhaps even frustrating, the reader's sense-making activity?"<sup>4</sup> Such questions could even, if we wished, call for "a kind of attention which one might call structuralist: a desire to isolate codes, to name the various languages with and along which the text plays, to go beyond manifest content to a series of forms and then to make these forms, or oppositions or modes of signification, the burden of the text."<sup>5</sup>

How, then, do Forsythe and Garfield think about *Edwin Drood*? What questions about it do they answer? Let me take up these matters by way of one more question: Exactly what kind of mystery, in the fullest sense, is *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*?<sup>6</sup> As any dictionary reminds us, a mystery can be at least one or

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<sup>1</sup>Leon Garfield [and Charles Dickens], *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); "Charles Forsythe," *The Decoding of Edwin Drood* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980). The dust jacket tells us that "Charles Forsythe" is "in fact a pseudonym for a husband and wife team who wish to retain their anonymity."

<sup>2</sup>For a few who share this (admittedly minority) view, see: James Wright, "Afterword," *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, reprinted in *Dickens: Modern Judgements*, ed. A. E. Dyson (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 270-77 [originally 1961]; A. O. J. Cockshut, "Edwin Drood: Early and Late Dickens Reconciled," in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), pp. 227-38; A. E. Dyson, *The Inimitable Dickens* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 267-93; and, by implication, Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), *passim*.

<sup>3</sup>For intention, see: Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), esp. pp. 258-339; for codes, see: Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), *passim*; for conventions, see: Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 131-60.

<sup>4</sup>Susan R. Suleiman, "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," in *The Reader in the Text*, ed. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Culler, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup>Cockshut comes closest to what I have in mind: "What, in the last resort, is Dickens's attitude to all the things he collectively symbolized by the Cathedral? . . . It is more a question of a new development in his religious sensibility—" (pp. 237-38). To which I would add: his historical and his cultural sensibility as well.

more of the following: an idea or awareness, often religious; a cult; a rite; a type of drama; and a type of popular prose fiction. Elsewhere I hope to show more fully how *Edwin Drood* involves all of these. But for now, how do they apply to Garfield's and Forsyte's versions of Dickens's story?

For Forsyte, or for the purposes of Forsyte's particular "decoding," *Edwin Drood* is a mystery story above all. This assumption even determined how Forsyte's book was published. It takes the format of Scribner's mystery novels and even advertises on its dust jacket such able contemporary practitioners as P.D. James, Robert Barnard, and Sheila Radley, rather than, say, writings by Poe, or Dostoevsky, or even Graham Greene—all, I would argue, more appropriate company for Dickens's *Edwin Drood*, and mine. Forsyte is quite clear about this. He begins his introduction, "A Personal Investigation," as follows: "*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is the most successful mystery story ever written" (p. 13); and he concludes it with a quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson only too appropriate for Forsyte's assumptions: ". . . and who else can carpenter in England, now that Wilkie Collins is played out?" (p. 106). In his "search for clues to the solution" (p. 50), Forsyte examines the well-known external evidence of the intentions of what Booth would call Dickens "the writer" (p. 268), intentions of the sort that Droodians have picked over for almost a hundred years, and reaches the same tentative, sensible conclusions about the unfinished text's hermeneutic code as have other responsible critics.<sup>7</sup> Yet even here Forsyte's insistence on naturalizing *Edwin Drood*, almost wholly by means of the conventional genre of the mystery story,<sup>8</sup> leads him, as it has many others, to the curious belief that a great artist such as Dickens, after the thirty-five triumphant years of what Booth calls "the career writer" (p. 270), should suddenly intend to become Wilkie Collins, and write accordingly.

It was to be expected that Forsyte should pay special heed to *Edwin Drood*'s hermeneutic code: "The detective story constitutes an exacerbation of the meta-hermeneutic 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."<sup>9</sup> But such exacerbation, such special heed, has implications which Forsyte unabashedly proclaims. To decode hermeneutically as clearly as possible, his completion will "not try to imitate the Inimitable, but rather to find a style that would be acceptable to readers today" (p. 106). Moreover, he will not give us a full second half of *Edwin Drood* for "a modern continuation at such Victorian length would be excessive" (p. 106). Worst of all for any serious response to the challenge of the work, "The meaning of this novel I must leave to the scholars and critics. My concern is with the mystery story . . . the first great psychological crime story in our literature" (p. 222).

Subjected to these limitations, and even granting his admission that Dickens at least wrote a psychological "crime story," Forsyte's Part Two, "*The Mystery of Edwin Drood Completed*," could only be, and is, little more than a scenario for the second half of the work. Perhaps, to be fair, it intends no more. As a result, it is false to all but the most summary version of authorial intention, however

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<sup>7</sup>For the most complete responsible version, see: Richard M. Baker, *The Drood Murder Case* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951); for the most irresponsible, see: Felix Aylmer, *The Drood Case* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964). Aylmer does, however, conveniently summarize the evidence, much of it now available, along with a definitive text, in Margaret Caldwell, ed., Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>8</sup>For genre as a naturalizing convention, see Culler, pp. 145-48.

<sup>9</sup>Gerald Prince, "Notes on the Text as Reader," *The Reader in the Text*, p. 238.

defined. And it makes no real attempt to carry on the full texture of language, image, allusion, character, symbol, and even direct comment that encodes Dickens's own text fully for our decoding.

In addition to the convention of genre, there is another convention, also noted by Culler, which any literary completion can and should, very subtly, involve: ". . . parody itself, which serves as a powerful device of naturalization" (p. 152). But apart from the obvious Dickensian intentional authority of names, "facts," and certain broad clues that cannot be denied, Forsythe, unlike Garfield, does not, to quote Culler again, "capture something of the spirit of the original as well as imitate its formal devices and produce through slight variation—usually of lexical items—a distance between the *vraisemblance* of the original and its own" (pp. 152-53). The distance between Forsythe and Dickens is simple discrepancy rather than any of the several possible forms of parodic critical response. Such parodic gestures can range from unqualified love through varieties of severity and comprehension to the point where parody, even the self-parody that tints Dickens's half of *Edwin Drood*, grows into one form of what Culler calls "situational irony . . . a mode of existential recuperation" (p. 154). But there is little in Forsythe's completion to invite us to such complex responses.

Forsythe's failure to comprehend *Edwin Drood* fully is also shown by his tendency to add material rather than develop that already present. To put it another way, his completion, like much of his introduction, carries on and complicates the proairetic code of actions and the hermeneutic code of questions, often through extended, indirect narrative summaries by various characters, but slights the semic, symbolic, and cultural codes in a way the first half of *Edwin Drood*, with its density of structure and significance, never did. One partial exception: Forsythe's brief attempt to convey the atmosphere of Cloisterham and its Cathedral culture. On the whole, however, we are shown what happens but not, in the fullest sense, how or why. Hence such oversimplifications as: "for murderers are not sympathetic characters to Dickens" (p. 83). In his introduction Forsythe had made a long, very thorough analysis of *Edwin Drood*'s multifarious "dualities" (pp. 82-105). However, apart from some imagery of black and white and some biblical allusion, these dualities are not encoded into his completion other than pro-airetically and hermeneutically. The story, as completed by Forsythe, even ends with Mr. Grewgious's reiterated testimonial to the "promising future" of Bazzard in particular and "the *Private Detective*" (p. 218) in general.

One special code or convention shared by Dickens and his readers was that of the monthly parts, as evidenced by the surviving number plans and by the physical format in which such serialization reached the reader. Later editions, including the most recent, do not usually emphasize or, in many cases, even indicate such divisions. It would be unfair, I suppose, to expect completions of *Edwin Drood* to be so planned or so presented, even though some readers feel they can trace the original structure of the monthly parts counterpointed against the many other structural patterns in Dickens's own, now undivided, texts. But part publication called for a commitment not only to structure but also to scope and substance. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was to appear in twelve monthly parts, as is well known; Dickens died after writing almost six. Hence any completion of the story—and our thinking about the whole story—must, if true to the intention declared by the monthly parts, be of a text twice as long, twice as full, as that Dickens left us. By this convention, Forsythe's completion is only a third as long as it should be and even less full. Garfield's completion, on the other hand, is two-thirds the promised length and aspires to, even at times approaches, Dickensian fullness.

Garfield and Forsyte agree on the basic issue of the literal story, as by now do most commentators, but differ on many significant particulars. For example, both have Neville killed by Jasper: but Forsyte at the top of the Cathedral tower during Jasper's final confounding, Garfield in London some time before. Forsyte reintroduces the opium woman at the very end as the W. S. Gilbertian former nurse of Rosa and her mother and makes her the direct agent of Jasper's self-discovery as the murderer; Garfield makes her a would-be blackmailer, part of the web of forces of light and dark that gradually tighten around Jasper during the second half of the story. Forsyte has Sapsea comically seek the hand of the Dean's unnamed daughter; Garfield, on the other hand, has Sapsea ironically seek the hand of Rosa Bud through Jasper himself. Forsyte uses Datchery surprisingly little and reveals him, almost by the way, to have been Bazzard in disguise; Garfield develops Datchery as a new character involved in interesting ways with characters and codes we had already encountered in the first half. Forsyte attributes Jasper's divided identity chiefly to the unusual circumstances of his birth and childhood; Garfield leaves it a "mystery of iniquity," sounded by the text's full resonances—moral, psychological, historical, theological, cultural.<sup>10</sup> Forsyte has Jasper hanged in his cell during the night, by his other self; Garfield has him hanged ritually at the appointed time by the public executioner, Crisparkle with him to the end.

Garfield's *Edwin Drood*, like Forsyte's and even Dickens's, is a mystery story in the popular sense. But like Dickens's and unlike Forsyte's, it is also a "mystery" in other, more profound senses. It achieves this by carrying on Dickensian intentions as fully as possible; within a text encoded, so far as possible, as fully as that of the first half, the work of Dickens. Put more simply, for these and other reasons Garfield's text bears rereading more than Forsyte's, almost as much as Dickens's.

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. In his completion, Garfield continues this pattern of echo and allusion to an almost parodic degree—his Datchery plays, among other parts, that of the Porter—but with no loss of structuring power.

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, which Garfield continues fully, 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*.

Religious mystery also enters our response to *Edwin Drood* through the generic conventions of literary Gothicism. Jasper, like M. G. Lewis's hero, is divided, as Jasper himself says, between sacred and profane, spirit and flesh.

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<sup>10</sup>Of such characters, and their "postulated writer" (Booth, p. 268), G. K. Chesterton wrote: "These dark pictures seem almost as if they were literally visions; things, that is, that Dickens saw but did not understand" (*Charles Dickens: The Last of the Great Men* [New York: Reader's Club, 1942 (1906)], p. 122). Their "implied author" (Booth, pp. 269-70) understood them only too well.

Like the victims of a Gothic tale of terror, the inhabitants of The Nun's House are all objects of erotic male desire, honorable or otherwise. But Gothicism is but part of Cloisterham's and its Cathedral's total past. This past, fully coded into a complex ambiguous setting for the violent action of the story, becomes thereby an equally complex ambiguous comment on Victorian England's religious and, in the largest sense, cultural origins and on the influence of those origins on its contemporary ethos. 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?

One last mystery: to what sources, sacred or profane, good or evil, do we attribute the power of music in *Edwin Drood* at once to reveal and to conceal? It is the strength of Leon Garfield's completion that it invites us to go on thinking about Charles Dickens's uncompleted *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in ways like these.

Lauriat Lane, Jr.  
University of New Brunswick

## Situating Borges: A Review of Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*

Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands last April quelled domestic unrest and united the people through a powerful appeal to nationalist feelings. This appeal has been a frequent one throughout Argentina's history, especially since the 1940's when Juan Domingo Perón exploited the Argentine need for self-definition and built a mass movement upon pronationalist, anti-imperialist sentiments. Lacking an indigenous population, Argentina was settled mainly by immigrants. Its citizens have often struggled to resolve problematical questions of national identity, vacillating between different, even contradictory definitions. For some Argentines, national identity entails, indeed is based upon, the anti-British, anti-European views put forth by Perón and encouraged by the present military junta. For others, to be Argentine is to be closely connected with Europe, to cultivate a cosmopolitan rather than a nationalist perspective on the world. The conflict between these opposing definitions of nationhood goes much deeper than the recent territorial dispute between Argentina and Great Britain. It has shaped Argentina's cultural as well as its political life. Traces of it can even be found in the works of Argentina's most illustrious author, Jorge Luis Borges.

One of the major contributions of Gene H. Bell-Villada's new book, *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1981), is that it corrects the widely-diffused but essentially inaccurate image of Borges as an apolitical, ahistorical artist solely concerned with meta-physical questions and fictional games. Bell-Villada presents Borges as a writer grounded in Latin America in general and Argentina in particular. In the process, he calls into question Borges's oft-quoted assertion that "life and death have been lacking in my life" and shows how personal and collective experiences shaped