Although the spurious continuations, editorial sequels and textual rewritings of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) are proof of its incredible powers of survival, Dickens’s incomplete novel is pervaded by a paradigm of dissolution and decomposition that characterises and determines its thematic and narrative structure. The various attempts to offer a solution and an epilogue to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* are indicative of the endless rebirths of Dickens’s last book, but also of the inherent impossibility of closing it.¹ Vermont printer Thomas James reported in 1873 that Dickens’s very spirit had inspired him with the conclusion of the story. The episode was so convincing that Arthur Conan Doyle, who noticed its similarities to the novelist’s peculiar literary style, praised this American ‘Version’. The title page of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood Complete: Part the Second* claimed that the book was ‘By the Spirit Pen of Charles Dickens, through a Medium’. A burlesque and parodic sequel to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, entitled *The Cloven Foot* (and later republished in Britain as *The Mystery of Mr. E. Drood: An Adaptation*), was written soon after Dickens’s death by an American writer named R. H. Newell (‘Orpheus C. Kerr’). In January 1914 a fictional trial for murder was organised by the Dickens Fellowship in London to ascertain the truth on the Drood case. The judge was G. K. Chesterton, and G. B. Shaw served as the foreman of the jury. J. Cuming Walters led the prosecution, while Cecil Chesterton acted for the defence.² This practice of resuscitating Dickens’s novel still continues: Leon Garfield’s *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1980), Charles Forsyte’s *The Decoding of Edwin Drood* (1980) and Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini’s Postmodern novel *La verità sul caso D. (The D Case, 1989)* are contemporary attempts at bringing Edwin’s mystery back to life, followed more recently by Dan Simmons’s *Drood* (2009),
featuring Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, and Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* (2009), mainly centred on late-Victorian literary piracy. Dickens's unfinished mystery also enjoyed revivifications in other medias, from films to musicals. After two silent versions dated 1909 and 1914, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was made into a sound film in 1935 (directed by Stuart Walker and starring Claude Rains as Jasper), which was followed in 1993 by another version directed by Timothy Folder (starring Robert Powell in the role of Jasper). In both movies John Jasper is held responsible for the murder of his nephew. To date, Rupert Holmes's successful musical *Drood*, which premiered in New York City's Central Park at the Delacore Theatre on 21 August 1985 (as part of the New York Shakespeare Festival), and was soon transferred to Broadway at the end of the same year, remains the most provocative musical adaptation of Dickens's novel. *Drood* had an enormous response and has continued to be produced ever since. The textual transmutations and the narrative destiny of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* seem to prove (sometimes in ironic terms) D. A. Miller's statement that even 'when one thinks closure impossible, one may never be able to think it away'. However, despite these testimonies of the endless (and even bizarre) rebirths of Dickens's unfinished novel, the latest critical approaches have demonstrated that the main interest of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* lies neither in what it should have been nor in the desire to evoke Dickens's narrative ghost, but in analysing the complex multi-layered meanings that determine its 'sense of unending'. The real innovative quality of Dickens's last written novel appears to be the way this incomplete story of moral and psychological villainy challenges the structural premises of the traditional Victorian novel. A tale of moral and psychological chaos, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* recounts the 'story of a dissolution' and enacts 'the dissolution of story' as a formal, narrative and hermeneutic unity. Within the frame of a mystery novel and through an emblematic assemblage of characters (first and foremost, John Jaspers, the choirmaster of Cloisterham Cathedral), Dickens conveys his troubled feelings and expresses his peculiar version of the Victorian novel, depicted by him as a fictional form that was decomposing in a culturally, morally and religiously decomposed world.

The mere fact that there has been a great amount of critical discussion about the original cover-design of the novel demonstrates that even figurative art is questionable in the case of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Kate Dickens-Perugini's first husband Charles Collins was involved at first in the creation of an early version of the cover-design, later passed into the hands of Luke Fildes (who finally illustrated it) because