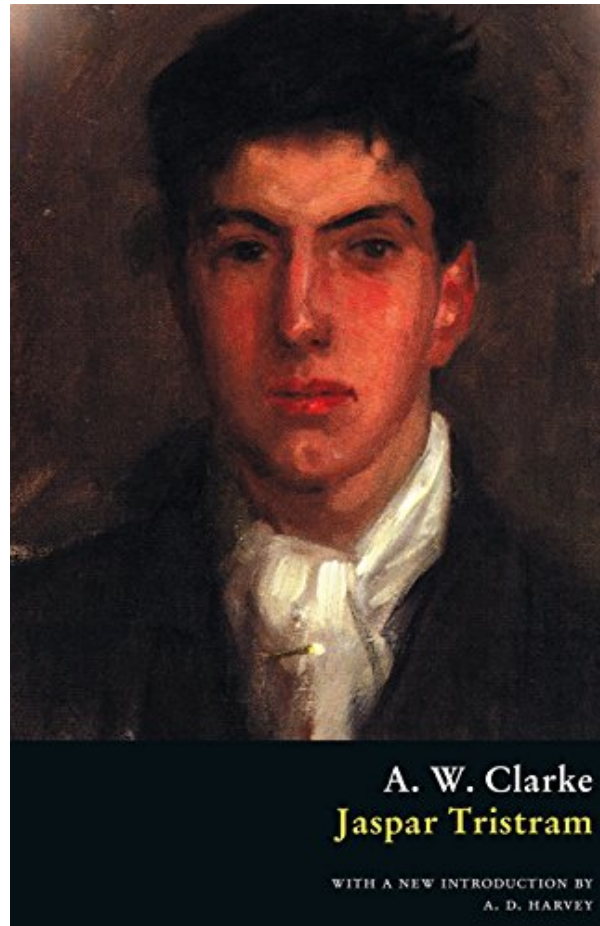
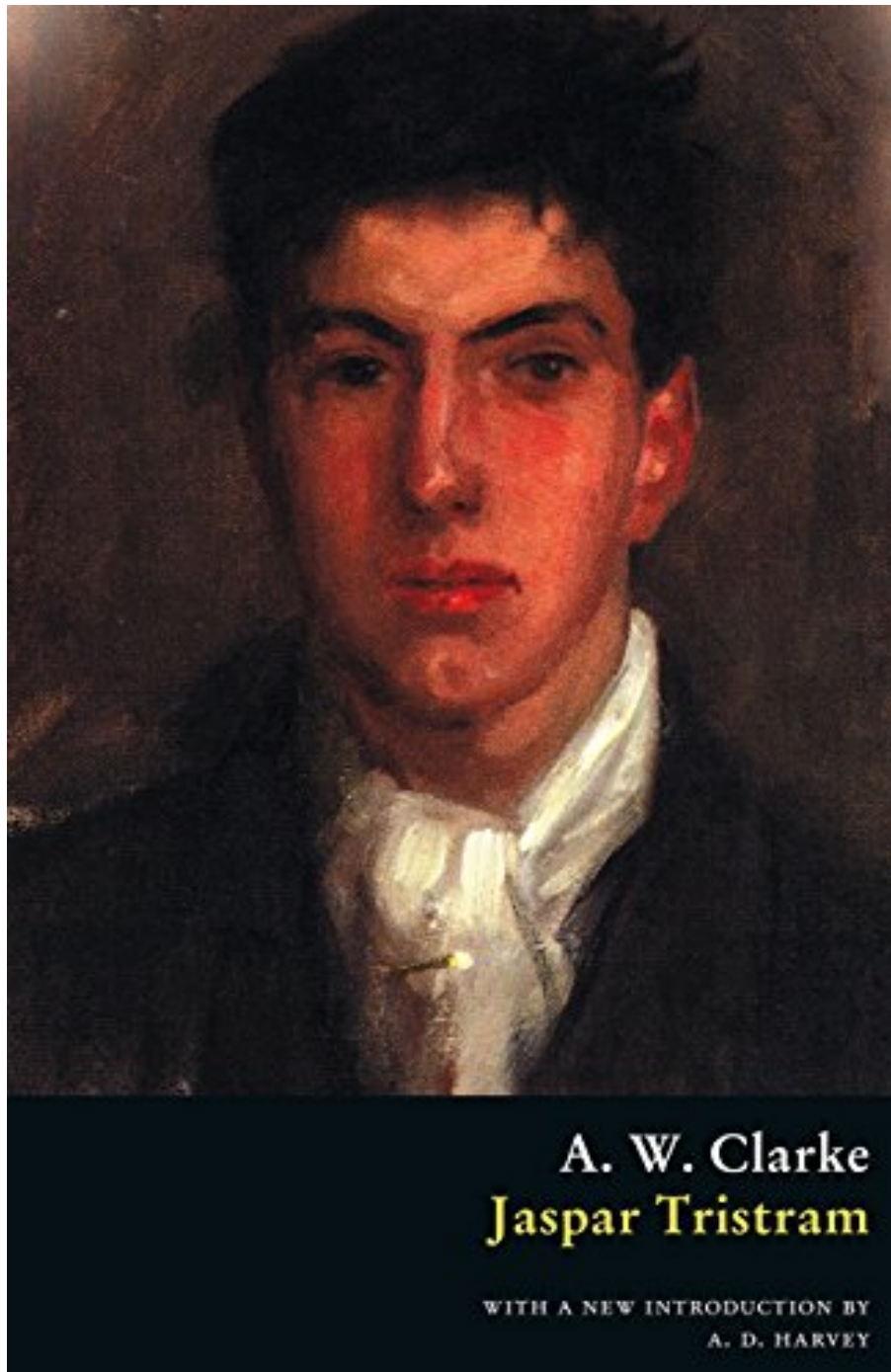


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'Mr Clarke is familiar with school-life, and writes about it amazingly well. The book deserves the attention of all those who care for the finer qualities of fiction. It is a remarkable book.' - The Times

'Far above the average novel.' - Saturday Review

'A real masterpiece.' - The Academy

'There is real power in it, and power of a somewhat rare kind. The author makes his story live as a real one to the mind of the reader.' - The Speaker

Based on the author's boarding school experiences at Radley College in the late 1870s, *Jaspar Tristram* (1899) is an extraordinary psychological study of the eponymous hero, tracing his thoughts and emotions as he proceeds from boyhood towards young adulthood: his unhappiness at school, his affection for the older boy Orr and later his love for his friend L. C. 'Elsie' Southwood. As A. D. Harvey writes in the Introduction, it is 'one of the most painfully convincing portrayals of adolescence ever written'. Though presented in the safer guise of a story of 'schoolboy friendships', it is also one of the earliest gay-themed English novels ever published.

Praised by late-Victorian critics, *Jaspar Tristram* quickly became a cult favourite in gay literary circles, counting Oscar Wilde (who called it 'charming'), Edward Carpenter, and Marc-André Raffalovich among its admirers, and it is also a likely influence on E. M. Forster's *Maurice* and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. This first-ever republication of the only novel by A. W. Clarke (1860-1913) reprints the unabridged text of the scarce first edition and includes a new introduction.

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Nineteenth-century English public school homoerotic love

By Max Fincher

Admired by Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter when it was published in 1899, *Jaspar Tristram*, was the only novel by Edward Ashley Walrond Clarke. The reflections of the eponymous adolescent public schoolboy are the story of the novel, which shows more than a touch of Henry James in how every motive

and feeling is analysed. The voice of the self-reflexive narcissistic Jaspur feels, like Dorian Gray, still very contemporary.

Arguably, the novel is one of the earliest to tackle the themes of both teenage loneliness and unrequited homoerotic attraction in the English public school system. Jaspur's emotional angst over his school friend Lancelot Clarke (L.C. or 'Elsie' as he affectionately nicknames him) is realistically depicted: 'Suddenly, as, leaning back against the jamb, he was opening his hand to the blaze, he felt it touched, and, looking round, met Elsie's eyes, and in that instant it seemed to him, not so much that they were reconciled, as that their friendship somehow passed into a different stage' (p.74). The queer moments of looks and silences between close friends and rivals is captured effectively, and may be based on Clarke's real experiences at Radley College in the late 1870s.

Undoubtedly, the novel is striking for its uncompromising honesty about the physical and emotional abuse suffered by boys at public schools in late nineteenth-century England (and indeed today) particularly if they were perceived to be 'queer'. Aloof and independent, Jaspur is mercilessly bullied by the cruel and sadistic Orr, an older boy whom he first encounters at his prep school. Clarke's insight into the sometimes complex psycho-sexual dimensions of homoerotic attraction is remarkable: 'He would gladly have suffered a hundred times more to have gained the approval of one who was so tall and strong and had such stern imperious ways' (p.14). Harvey sets the novel in the context of John Addington Symonds' recollections of the homosocial dimensions to public school life at Harrow.

Although as Harvey notes, the critical reception was mixed, and the second half of the novel is indeed perhaps 'dull', in that Jaspur later turns straight, falling in love with Elsie's twin sister, Clarke's novel is worth revisiting. Foreshadowing the themes of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and with touches of William Golding's, *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) Jaspur Tristram is also 'a love novel, and a very unusual one.'

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