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978-0-521-03151-6 - Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence

Valerie L. Gager

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Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence traces Dickens's interest in Shakespeare from childhood, not only through his own reading and performance but also through numerous theatrical, literary, and artistic sources. The book proceeds to examine theoretical ideas about influence and allusion as aspects of style, and analyses ways in which Dickens typically employs references to Shakespeare. The author argues that imaginative transformations of Shakespeare's words and ideas enrich all aspects of Dickens's writing, including aesthetic principles, language, imagery, plot, atmosphere, theme, tone, structure, foreshadowing, and characterization. *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield* are examined to demonstrate the sophisticated manner in which Dickens engages the reader in a continuous process of reassessment by creating a dense network of quotations, allusions, and echoes and by integrating successive references to comment upon, modify, or amplify prior usage. The final part contains an annotated catalogue of approximately one thousand references to Shakespeare's plays and poems drawn from Dickens's fiction, essays, letters, and speeches.

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The Dynamics of Influence

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For Dawn,
who marshall'd me the way
that I was going
and is now
treading in the steps.

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Preface

If brevity be the soul of wit, wrote Shakespearean Dickens, it is most certainly so in a preface. The preceding sentence has been written from memory, without quotation marks or textual citation, in keeping with one of the many ways in which Dickens typically refers to Shakespeare. These pages will show you more.

Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence began life as my Ph.D. thesis at the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham. While working there from 1989 to 1991, I was privileged to have Professor Stanley Wells as my supervisor. Professor Wells's long-standing belief that the experience of a reader is quite different from that of a spectator, a belief borne out in all his critical and editorial work, strengthened my conviction that Dickens's Shakespearean imagination operated on a plane approximating the theatrical experience. My residence in Stratford-upon-Avon for two years, where the Shakespeare Institute fosters a close relationship with the Royal Shakespeare Company, also afforded the invaluable opportunity of having countless theatrical experiences of my own, from RSC workshops to technical rehearsals, from first previews to final performances, thereby heightening my critical awareness of Shakespeare's plays as performance texts.

Whether Dickens was in his armchair or on either side of the footlights, clearly he viewed Shakespeare as a man of the theatre. Unlike many of his contemporaries who either never went to the theatre or preferred to read Shakespeare, Dickens immersed himself in both activities, assimilating the works of the dramatist to a greater depth and breadth than most Victorians and anticipating the direction of twentieth-century criticism as called for by Harley Granville-Barker.

Dickens nonetheless was a Victorian author who had a theatrical experience of Shakespeare quite different from ours in every sense except the vital aspect of being communal. A list of Dickens's friends and associates, many of whom accompanied him to the theatre and engaged afterwards in lively

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discussions, reads like a *Who's Who* of Shakespearean actors, biographers, editors, bibliophiles, adapters, restorers, burlesquers, historians, painters, costumiers, critics, and even forgers. Thus, my research extended beyond other influence studies into the areas of social, theatre, and art history; biographies of other Shakespeare interpreters; and nineteenth-century literary, art, and drama criticism in a variety of forms. By recognizing the potential influence of other interpretations and interpreters of Shakespeare on Dickens, I strove to minimize the risk of imposing twentieth-century American attitudes toward Shakespeare upon a nineteenth-century English author.

The Victorian attitude toward Shakespeare on either the page or the stage is too complex at any given time and underwent too many changes over the course of Dickens's lifetime to be covered at length within the scope of this book. Readers interested in pursuing this topic will find numerous studies addressing the issue from a variety of critical stances listed in my bibliography. To borrow from C. C. Barfoot, 'Swivelling Dick' is also difficult to pin down between the poles of Romantic and realistic thought. Dickens certainly did not indulge in the excesses of Bardolatry which typify many of his contemporaries, refusing to endorse some of the commemorative activities associated with the Shakespeare Tercentenary in 1864, yet he could speak reverently about rendering 'graceful homage' to 'the noblest of all dramatists' in the theatre. At a time when Bardolatry flourished, due partly to growing nationalism following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic campaigns, he could list Shakespeare before Milton, Bacon, Newton, and Watt in his roll call of distinctively English heroes in *Little Dorrit*, yet in the same novel he denounces insularity. Similarly, he risked the disapproval of his xenophobic associates for promoting the Shakespearean interpretations of a 'blasted Frenchman' on the London stage. Because this book is a study of Shakespeare's influence upon the works of Dickens, a phenomenon that has been recognized but never explored in depth, I have endeavoured to point out Victorian habits of thought solely as a means of illuminating Dickens's thinking without diverting attention from the topic at hand.

Even within the limits of an influence study, though, three different vantage points emerged from which I had initially considered viewing the topic. With references to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* clearly predominating over all others, I could have focused upon the manifestations of one or both tragedies in the corpus of Dickens's works. Because in any given novel Dickens usually refers to a variety of plays, another obvious choice was to examine the manner in which these references operate in a few novels. I also could have focused upon Dickens's imaginative treatment of aspects of the supernatural or paranormal as influenced by Shakespeare, since Dickens's references

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to passages dealing with ghosts, witches, fairies, dreams, transformation, and rebirth outweigh any other thematic classification. Faced with the difficult decision of whether my study should be driven by selected tragedies, by selected novels, or by common thematic concerns, I chose a fourth alternative which appeared to be the least limiting and thus potentially most helpful to others in the absence of a prior definitive study. The resulting approach and what I hope is a useful review of prior studies are set forth in the introduction to this book.

Nearing the verbosity of Mr Micawber (or is it Polonius?), I have already exceeded the limits of the precept with which this preface began. In short, the following pages provide insight on some of Dickens's references to Shakespeare. To my readers I leave the pleasure of developing the significance of hundreds more listed in the catalogue.

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A note on the text and acknowledgements

Like the works of Dickens and Shakespeare, this book frequently refers to the words and thoughts of prior authors. As is common scholarly practice, book and/or chapter references to Dickens's novels and line references to Shakespeare's plays and poems are given parenthetically within the body of my text. To avoid clutter, citations of more than one work are given in footnotes. A complete list of abbreviations used and editions cited follows.

Because Dickens had access to numerous editions of Shakespeare's *Works*, the lineation and text of *The Oxford Shakespeare* (1988) are cited unless otherwise noted. Some may think my adoption of the Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor edition odd, but it makes sense to use a text readily available to the modern reader. Rather than seeming strange to Dickens, using the text in which one is permitted to come closest to the theatrical experience of a play would be deemed eminently appropriate.

Quotations from John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* are acknowledged in footnotes by volume/book/chapter/page numbers from the 1966 Dent edition (A. J. Hoppé, ed.), which should enable the location of references in any edition. Dickens's speeches are identified by date and event and quoted from the authoritative 1960 Oxford edition (K. J. Fielding, ed.) with the exception of addresses delivered at private functions, which are not included by Fielding. Quotations from the Pilgrim and Nonesuch editions of Dickens's letters are identified by volume number, addressee, and date, which in many instances should permit the location of letters in other collections. However, the authoritative Pilgrim edition, which has been used to provide the accurate text of all letters written by Dickens up through 1855 (the most recent volume published), gives correct dates for letters previously misdated and includes letters published for the first time. Unless otherwise stated, all letters quoted are from Charles Dickens.

Intratextual comments upon or additions to quotations have been given in square brackets. The use of the word "*sic*" has been avoided as much as possible. Thus, the following chronic inconsistencies in Dickens's writing have not been commented upon: the use of initial capital letters for words

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not normally capitalized, the use of the “-or” ending rather than “-our”, the use of now-archaic spelling such as “groupe”, the use of two words, such as “to day”, rather than one, and the use of eccentric punctuation. For the sake of consistency the practice of the editors of the *Pilgrim Letters* in using full stops after all abbreviated titles (e.g., Mr.) has been followed. Variations in the spelling of Shakespeare’s surname by Dickens and other authors have been preserved without comment.

This book is a revision of my Ph.D. thesis titled ‘Dickens’s “So Potent Art”: Shakespearean Influences upon the Works of Charles Dickens’ (Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, 1991). Short extracts from chapter nine were included in an article titled “‘Our Pew at Church’: Another Interpretation by Way of Shakespeare’, published in *The Dickensian* (Spring 1993).

Although my obligation to the vast body of prior Dickensian and Shakespearean scholarship in pursuing this study is so great as to be immeasurable, my analytic approach is indebted primarily to examinations of allusion as an aspect of literary style and most particularly to important recent studies of Shakespeare’s influence upon the works of other authors and artists. Specifically, Jonathan Bate’s exemplary study, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, hailed as ‘a pioneering work which sets new standards for “influence” studies’ (R. S. White, ‘The Year’s Contributions to Shakespearian Study’, *Shakespeare Survey* 40 (1988), 200), and his equally fine companion work, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830*, as well as Edwin Stein’s *Wordsworth’s Art of Allusion*, welcomed as ‘the very model of what poststructuralist allusion studies might be’ (Peter L. Thorslev, Jr, ‘Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century’, *Studies in English Literature* 29 (1989), 773), have been especially helpful as paradigms.

I am thankful for the assistance and encouragement of the following individuals: Geraldine Pittman de Batlle, Paul Bayley, Andrew Bean, Robert Bearman, J. Birje-Patil, Anne Blake, Philip Collins, Gillian Day, Barbara Everett, Simon Faulkner, Russell Jackson, Dawn Massey, Paul Nelsen, David Parker, Elizabeth Pearson, Roger Pringle, Niky Rathbone, Philip Rose, Jill Russell, Colin Sorensen, George Speaight, Joan Stottlemeyer, Kathleen Tillotson, and John Wilders. The librarians of the Birmingham Central Reference, Bodleian, British, Carroll College, Marlboro College, Shakespeare Centre, University of Birmingham, and University of California–Berkeley libraries and staff members of the Tate Gallery have all been most helpful. Financial assistance granted by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom, the

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Abbreviations

The Penguin English Library edition has been used for the text of all fictional works unless otherwise noted.

1 Works written or edited by Charles Dickens

- AN *American Notes for General Circulation* (The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1958)
- AYR *All the Year Round*
- BH *Bleak House* (Bantam Classic, 1983)
- BL *The Battle of Life: A Love Story*
- BM *Bentley's Miscellany*
- BR *Barnaby Rudge; A Tale of the Riots of 'Eighty*
- C *The Chimes*
- CC *A Christmas Carol*
- CH *The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home*
- CHE *A Child's History of England* (The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1958)
- CP *Collected Papers* (Nonesuch edition, 1937)
- CS *Christmas Stories*
- DC *The Personal History and Experience of David Copperfield The Younger*
- DS *Dombey and Son*
- GE *Great Expectations*
- HM *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*
- HT *Hard Times* (Norton Critical second edition, 1990)
- HW *Household Words*
- LD *Little Dorrit*
- MC *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*
- MED *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (World's Classics edition, 1982)

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NN	<i>The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby</i>
OCS	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>
OMF	<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>
OT	<i>Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress</i>
O'T	<i>O'Thello</i> (MS, <i>Dickensian</i> 73)
PFI	<i>Pictures from Italy</i> (The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1958)
PP	<i>The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club</i>
RP	<i>Reprinted Pieces</i> (The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1958)
SB	<i>Sketches by Boz</i> (The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1958)
SG	<i>The Strange Gentleman: A Comic Burletta in two acts</i> (London: W. Miller, 1928)
TTC	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>
UT	<i>The Uncommercial Traveller</i> (The Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1958)

ii Biographies, collections, letters, and speeches of Dickens

If two abbreviations are given, the first is used in my catalogue and the second is used in footnotes.

ABC	<i>Letters from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts</i> (ed. E. Johnson)
JF Life	<i>The Life of Charles Dickens</i> by John Forster (ed. A. J. Hoppé)
Lemon	<i>The Unpublished Letters of Charles Dickens to Mark Lemon</i> (ed. W. Dexter)
MCC	<i>Recollections of Writers</i> by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke (ed. R. Gittings)
NL NLetters	The Nonesuch edition of <i>The Letters of Charles Dickens</i> (ed. W. Dexter)
PL Letters	The Pilgrim edition of <i>The Letters of Charles Dickens</i> (eds. M. House and G. Storey)
Speeches	<i>The Speeches of Charles Dickens</i> (ed. K. J. Fielding)
USp	'Some Uncollected Speeches by Dickens' (ed. P. Collins)
UW	<i>The Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens</i> (ed. H. Stone)
WC	<i>Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins</i> (ed. L. Hutton)
WHW	<i>Charles Dickens as Editor: Being Letters Written by Him to William Henry Wills</i> (ed. R. C. Lehmann)

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iii The works of William Shakespeare

Unless otherwise indicated the text of *The Oxford Shakespeare* (eds. S. Wells and G. Taylor) is cited.

1H4	<i>The History of Henry the Fourth</i> (1 Henry IV)
2GV	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>
2H4	<i>The Second Part of Henry the Fourth</i>
2H6	<i>The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster</i> (2 Henry VI)
3H6	<i>The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry the Sixth</i> (3 Henry VI)
12N	<i>Twelfth Night, or What You Will</i>
Ado	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
AW	<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i>
A&C	<i>The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra</i>
AYLI	<i>As You Like It</i>
CE	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
Cor	<i>Coriolanus</i>
Cym	<i>Cymbeline, King of Britain</i>
Ham	<i>The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark</i>
H5	<i>The Life of Henry the Fifth</i>
JC	<i>The Tragedy of Julius Caesar</i>
KJ	<i>The Life and Death of King John</i>
KL	<i>The Tragedy of King Lear</i>
Mac	<i>The Tragedy of Macbeth</i>
MM	<i>Measure for Measure</i>
MV	<i>The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or Otherwise Called the Jew of Venice</i>
MWW	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>
MND	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
Oth	<i>The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice</i>
Per	<i>Pericles, Prince of Tyre</i>
R2	<i>The Tragedy of King Richard the Second</i>
R3	<i>The Tragedy of King Richard the Third</i>
R&J	<i>The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet</i>
Shr	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
Son	Sonnets
Tem	<i>The Tempest</i>
Tim	<i>The Life of Timon of Athens</i>
Tit	<i>The Most Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus</i>
WT	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>

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Abbreviations

iv Works of other authors

- TJ* Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*
TS Laurence Sterne, *The Life & Opinions of Tristram Shandy*
U James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Vintage Books, 1986)