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SHAKESPEARE AMONG THE VICTORIANS: INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE ON DICKENS

Kyamalia Bairagya

The legacy of Shakespeare, to the Victorians was complex and ambivalent. It was often in bits and pieces that the Victorians encountered Shakespeare in various ways and forms particularly in the anthologies and adaptations. This was the era when Shakespeare became serious business. His name, his words, his characters get attached to durables and consumables from crockery and clocks to opium packages and other consumer items. His influence was even strong among the writers of the Victorian era. His plays were widely enacted on stage under various production banners and served as inspirations for Victorian dramatists as well as novelists. Shakespeare provided the Victorians with immense repertoire of characters and stories and verbal expressions, through which the Victorian writers could be inspired and encouraged from. Hence Shakespeare's influence in the Victorian age was strongly felt among most of the writers. Dickens was one among all writers whose life was greatly influenced by Shakespeare's plays as seen by him in various contemporary performances.

In his last public address Dickens incorporated quotations from *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. It is also found by critics that Dickens has been alluding to passages from Shakespeare's works in every one of his novels, as well as in many of his stories, letters, essays and speeches. Twentieth century critics have also suggested parallels between the two authors, finding even more diverse points of comparison. It is not only in textual references or allusions that Dickens has manifested the influence of Shakespeare but also in the overall thematic content and its form. Alan Horseman finds that Dickens's ability to appeal to both popular and sophisticated levels resemble that of Shakespeare's maturity and popularity. Similarly Algernon Swinburne finds that in *Great Expectations*, the tragedy and the comedy, the realism and the imaginary aspect of life are fused or mingled together in a Shakespearean strength and skill of hand. Otto Ludwig concludes that *Great Expectations* is a Shakespearean drama applied to the interests of a modern age particularly discovering the spirit of Shakespeare in the moral justice which permits the convict to die happy in the belief that Pip will inherit his wealth and live on as a gentleman. Not only this novel, it is in all other of his novels that Dickens has implied direct and indirect influences.

