

THE NOVEL NOVEL:

DICKENS' REFORMULATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

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ABSTRACT

From 1830 to the mid 1870s, interest in Shakespeare flourished in England, and an extensive number of scholars have written about this fact. Many of those writers include Charles Dickens in their arguments. In spite of this plethora of research, I propose a new light through which to analyze Dickens and the Victorian Shakespeare, that of the conflation of the stage and the novel and the way in which they interact, focusing particularly on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and using M.M. Bakhtin's theory of the novel to analyze this interaction. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin contrasts the young genre of the novel with other genres set in their strict structure. In appropriating the drama of *Hamlet* into his novels, Dickens takes advantage of the young and fluid nature of the novel in order to more closely examine *Hamlet*.

Overall, I argue in this paper that Dickens' incorporation of *Hamlet* into his novels allows one to discover new aspects of *Hamlet* that one cannot analyze on the stage, and I focus specifically on *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *A Christmas Carol* and divide my thesis into three major sections, the stage, the hero, and King Hamlet's ghost.

INTRODUCTION

HAMLET, DICKENS, AND VICTORIAN THEATREGOERS

From 1830 to the mid 1870s, interest in Shakespeare flourished in England. There was a proliferation of new editions of Shakespeare and an increased interest in Shakespeare's life and times. In 1840, John Payne Collier formed the first Shakespeare society. Although it lasted only 13 years, disappearing in 1853, its formation reveals this growing interest in studying Shakespeare. Between 1851 and 1860 at least 162 editions of Shakespeare's complete works were published, including a serial publication of his works, allowing almost anyone to eventually own the complete works of Shakespeare (Taylor 184). By 1868, Shakespeare's works had become a textbook (Taylor 193-194). Adrian Poole writes that the Victorians liked to believe they "had Shakespeare in their blood and bones" (1).

In light of this upsurge in the popularity of Shakespeare, it is not surprising that an extensive number of scholars have written on Shakespeare and the Victorians. Almost as many writers have added Charles Dickens, as today's most popular Victorian novelist, to that discussion. Some scholars such as Richard Foulkes focus on the Victorian stage and Dickens' own status as an amateur playwright. Others, like Robert Sawyer, focus on Shakespearean references in the Victorian Novel.

Adrian Poole in *Shakespeare and the Victorians* devotes a chapter to three novelists: Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy. In terms of *Hamlet*, she focuses on how it was a sort of a presiding spirit over the Victorians and that it lies behind many nineteenth century novels, because so many focus on sons seeking to claim their inheritance and finding their place in the world. When speaking of Dickens, her main arguments relate to the interactions of characters. She generally does not focus on a single play in relation to

Dickens, arguing more that Shakespeare as a whole permeates his novels. The novel and play which she spends the most time discussing are *Hard Times* and *King Lear*.

In spite of a plethora of research dating from the nineteenth century to the present day, I propose a new light through which to analyze Dickens and the Victorian Shakespeare, that of the conflation of these two genres and the way in which they interact, focusing particularly on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and using M.M. Bakhtin's theory of the novel as the lens through which I will analyze these works. Indeed, throughout my research I have found no scholar who has connected Shakespeare, Dickens and Bakhtin. Bakhtin's theory on the development of the novel, as presented in *The Dialogic Imagination*, plays an integral part in my argument.

Juliet John specifically discusses *Hamlet* in Dickens' work in her article "Dickens and Hamlet." However, my argument contains many themes that she overlooks. In this article she focuses primarily on the way that Dickens uses his characters to argue that Hamlet is not an "Everyman." Her insight into the distinction between Victorian views and Dickens' views are useful; however, she neglects to discuss the uniqueness of Hamlet as a character and the way Hamlet, above all other dramatic characters, is particularly suited for adaptation into the novel because of his novelistic characteristics.

One might assume that Valerie L. Gager's *Shakespeare and Dickens*, an entire book devoted to these two authors would leave few new things to be discussed; however, my argument focuses on a variety of ideas which she overlooks. For a majority of her book she traces Dickens' interest in Shakespeare from childhood and discusses how Shakespeare enriches all aspects of his novels. In her introduction she admits that she focuses on themes rather than on specific plays or novels; in fact, she does not spend

considerable time on any one novel until the end of the book where she uses *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield* to argue that Dickens creates a network of allusions to comment on previous uses. Although I will be using *David Copperfield* in my argument, she only briefly touches upon *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Great Expectations* and hardly even mentions *A Christmas Carol*, the other three novels that play an integral role in my thesis.

In terms of her discussion of *David Copperfield*, she argues more that the spirit of Shakespeare, rather than any particular play, resides over the novel. What she says that connects *Hamlet* most strongly with *David Copperfield* is the concern of both with memory, with a plot centered on a father's death already past (241). Her argument is useful for further research on father figures within these novels, but she neglects to discuss how *Hamlet* and *Copperfield* relate to one another as heroes of different genres. In addition, she does not discuss the implications of placing elements of a drama within a novel. She mentions briefly that one might consider *Hamlet* "novelistic" because it focuses on the hero's point of view and has a stronger emphasis on narrative (241); however, she does not discuss the way that this affects *Hamlet* and *David Copperfield*, and she does not incorporate theories relating to the novel or the drama. She mainly uses this connection to present another similarity to between *Hamlet* and *David Copperfield*.

Bakhtin on the Novel

M. M. Bakhtin's writings on the genre of the novel as presented in *The Dialogic Imagination* play a fundamental part in my analysis of the incorporation of *Hamlet* in Dickens' novels. Bakhtin begins in his first chapter with a discussion of the developing nature of the genre of the novel, contrasting it with all other genres that are set in their

strict structures. In this way, according to Bakhtin, the novel cannot have a harmonious relationship with these genres when placed within the confines of them, for in comparison to them, the novel is an infant. By this he means that genres other than the novel have existed for so long that they follow a set pattern. The boundaries of the novel, on the other hand, are much more flexible. We see this in the variety of sub-genres that exist in the novel. In 1859, David Masson, in his book *British Novelists and Their Styles*, identified 13 varieties of the novel such as “the novel of supernatural phantasy” and “the art and culture novel” (221-233). Some Victorian authors did not understand the adaptability of the novel, such as George Eliot who advocated realism and a few other select sub-genres as the only “true” forms of the novel. Bakhtin says that of “considerable...consequence are those normative definitions offered by novelists themselves, who produce a specific novel and then declare *it* the only correct, necessary and authentic form of the novel” (9). The variety of critics who believe they have found the only proper form for the novel actually reveals how unstructured this genre remains.

Bakhtin declares the most important aspect of the novel to be its adaptability. He writes, “The novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality” (7). This openendedness, this unrestricted nature of the novel, is what allows for the fluidity of the genre, incorporating other genres into itself and critiquing them in the process. Part of my argument focuses on this openendedness of the novel, which allows us to further critique the play of *Hamlet* once it has been placed in the genre of the novel.

The openendedness of the novel also affects the author’s role within his own work. According to Bakhtin, the creator of a work, even an autobiographical one,

“remains outside the world he has represented in his work” (256). Understanding the author is essential to understanding the work. Bakhtin writes, “If one fails to sense this second level, the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to understand the work” (315).

What Bakhtin states separates the novel from other genres more than these other aspects is the character of the hero. I will go into his argument in more depth in chapter two, but I will briefly introduce it here. In Bakhtin’s opinion, the hero of the novel cannot be a stereotypical model as many other heroes are. He writes, “The individual in the high and distanced genres is an individual of the absolute past and of the distanced image. As such he is a fully finished and completed being” (34). The hero of the novel, on the other hand, “is either greater than his fate, or less than his condition as a man....There always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness; there always remains a need for the future” (37). According to Bakhtin, the heroes of these distanced genres such as the epic and drama are limited as characters, whereas the hero of the novel always possesses this unrealized potential and lives on indefinitely.

Not only is the hero of the novel different from the hero of other genres because of his unboundedness, only in the novelistic hero can we experience an exciting journey. Bakhtin writes, “We can experience these adventures, identify with these heroes, such novels almost become a substitute for our own lives. Nothing of the sort is possible in the epic and other distanced genres” (32). He argues that other genres can never allow such an experience unless they have been novelized. I disagree, for I find the character of Hamlet an exception to this rule. In Hamlet we find a character who represents many of our own struggles, allowing us to find ourselves in his story. Bakhtin also declares that

the hero of a novel is “always more or less an ideologue” (38); however Hamlet reveals that the trait is not restricted to novelistic heroes, for the character of Hamlet, through his many soliloquies and monologues, shows us that he too is an ideologue.

I am not arguing, however, that *Hamlet*, as a play, falls into the category of the novel. In a chapter of his book entitled “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin tackles the stylistics of the novel. Traditional stylistics cannot deal with novel discourse (266), and the novel does not require the stylistic conditions which other genres, in his discussion particularly poetry, do (264). Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, like his other plays, primarily in iambic pentameter, qualifying it as poetry as well as drama. For this reason, stylistics play a strong role in *Hamlet*, but they do not limit Hamlet as a hero.

Overall, Bakhtin dismantles the complex topic of the novel, and his views allow for a better understanding of the transformation of genre in the incorporation of *Hamlet* into Dickens’ novels.

My Argument

Dickens novels often criticized Victorian culture, such as revealing the truth of the workhouses as in *Hard Times* or the slums as in *Oliver Twist*, and the Victorian theatre, though not as serious as the other social issues, provides one more aspect of society which he critiqued.

The Victorian obsession with *Hamlet* arose partly out of a desire for facts. They saw Hamlet as Shakespeare, and so they analyzed the play as a sort of biography. As one writer ponders in an article published in *New Monthly Magazine* in 1873, “Why is it that we look upon Hamlet as being no other than Shakespeare himself?” (297). Perhaps

Dickens expresses a dislike of Hamlet in his novels and in articles because of the way this dissection of Hamlet limits his character. Dickens endeavored to show, by making use of the fluid genre of the novel, that there is much more to Hamlet than a biographical figure and reveals that he can use the novel to adapt Hamlet, both as a character and a play, in a variety of ways.

In appropriating the drama of *Hamlet* into his novels, Dickens takes advantage of the young and fluid nature of the novel in order to more closely examine *Hamlet*, and his incorporations of this renowned play in his novels arise from a desire for a more academic look at the theatre. The novel, Bakhtin says, speculates what is unknown and pushes boundaries (33). In incorporating *Hamlet* into the novel, Dickens pushes the boundaries of this play and allows us to examine it more closely than once was possible in the theatre alone.

Overall, I argue in this paper that Dickens' incorporation of *Hamlet* into his novels allows one to discover new aspects of *Hamlet* that one cannot analyze on the stage. I chose to analyze *Hamlet* in these novels in spite of the fact that Dickens' novels reference many other plays of Shakespeare for a variety of reasons. First of all, *Hamlet* is about a young man trying to find his place in the world. He is unsure whether "to be or not to be," (3.1.56), and in the "antic disposition" (1.5.172) that he puts on, even the audience is unaware how much of his madness is an act. Within the novel, *Hamlet*, as an entire play, is trying to find its place in the world. In the actual performance of *Hamlet* in *Great Expectations*, as well as in the plethora of other references to this play throughout Dickens' novels, Dickens takes *Hamlet* out of the world of drama and places it into the

world of the novel, reinventing the nature of the play itself. Hamlet as a character also allows for a unique analysis for he does not fit the standard bounds of the dramatic hero.

In my argument I focus specifically on *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *A Christmas Carol*. I chose these novels for the various aspects of *Hamlet* which they discuss, specifically the three themes upon which the chapters of my thesis focus: the stage, the hero, and the ghost. In *Great Expectations* Dickens gives us a very unique picture of *Hamlet*. Dickens places the performance of Mr. Wopsle almost at the direct center of the novel, as it is chapter thirty one of fifty nine, emphasizing the idea that this play permeates every corner of this novel, providing many other themes which connect this novel with Shakespeare's play including ghosts, insanity, Pip without a father, revenge motivated actions and the hero's guilt. I chose *David Copperfield* because, like *Hamlet* it contains a very complex hero, perhaps because both, as many argue, are autobiographical works. *Nicholas Nickleby* presents an interesting look at the theatrical side of *Hamlet*, and *A Christmas Carol* brings up the concept of King Hamlet's ghost. As you see, each of these novels that I chose has a main theme which permeates it; however, each novel also finds its way into the other chapters of my thesis. I also desired to move away from some of the other novels often associated with *Hamlet* such as *Little Dorrit* in order to further the scholarly work on *Hamlet* and Dickens written thus far.

As Bakhtin says, "There are different ways to falsify someone else's words while taking them to their furthest extreme, to reveal their *potential* content" (339 n28). Dickens reformulates *Hamlet* in his novels, revealing this potential content not present on the stage. In a prelude, I discuss the way in which Shakespeare appeared more frequently

on the page during the nineteenth century. Then, in chapter one I focus in particular on the way the stage functions in these novels as it relates to *Hamlet*, arguing that the novel provides a new “stage” for Hamlet, which allows a new investigation of it. In chapter two I turn to the hero of these novels in order to juxtapose the novelistic hero against Hamlet, the hero of a play, and to analyze how these characters relate to one another. I follow Bakhtin’s argument in regards to his discussion of the novelistic hero, but I also depart from it as I discuss Hamlet and the way he disproves parts of Bakhtin’s thesis. In chapter three I move to a different character in *Hamlet*, King Hamlet’s ghost in order to explore some of the reasons for his frequent appearances in Dickens’ works.

PRELUDE

THE WRITTEN SHAKESPEARE

As a prelude to my discussion of the drama within the novel, I will first discuss the way that Shakespeare's works increasingly appeared on the written page during the Victorian era. Publication of Shakespeare's works flourished during the nineteenth century, allowing the lower classes more access to the great plays of Shakespeare. Between 1838 and 1843 the Knight's edition of Shakespeare was published serially, allowing almost anyone to eventually own a copy of Shakespeare's complete works, and from 1851 to 1860 at least 162 editions of Shakespeare were published (Taylor 184).

Mary Cowden-Clarke, the wife of Charles Cowden-Clark who I discuss in chapter two, inspired much interest in Shakespeare through the written word, particularly for women. Her book *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* is a collection of fictional tales which focus on the female characters in Shakespeare's plays and tell the story of what their lives might have been like before the start of the play in which they appear. She takes these stage characters and re-forms them as characters in a prose story, allowing us to analyze aspects of the characters which could not be critiqued in the same way when on stage. Mary Cowden-Clarke also compiled, by hand, the first complete concordance of Shakespeare titled *The complete concordance to Shakespeare: being a verbal index to all the passages in the dramatic works of the poet*, first published in 18 parts from 1844 to 1845. She also wrote "Shakespeare as the Girl's Friend," an article published in 1887 in *The Girl's Own Paper*. In this article Cowden-Clarke goes through a variety of Shakespeare's plays and explains the values presented in them. She focuses solely on the female characters in the plays, for Shakespeare shows in them women's "highest qualities" and "their defects and foibles" (562). She concludes the article

encouraging girls to read Shakespeare for themselves, in Lamb's children's version first, of course, then read by their mother who will skip over the inappropriate material; however she does encourage girls to read Shakespeare for themselves once they have reached an appropriate age (564). Kathryn Prince writes in *Shakespeare in the Victorian Periodicals*, "Again and again, in magazines for children, for women, for the working class, readers are invited to consider what Shakespeare might mean to them on an acutely personal level" (9). These readers are introduced to these works off of the stage, allowing readers to draw alternative conclusions and meanings within the text.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Victorians saw an explosion in new editions of Shakespeare. Shakespeare on the page extends beyond people simply owning copies of his works. During this era, Shakespeare also made his way off the stage and into academics. Between 1863 and 1866 *The Cambridge Shakespeare* was published in nine volumes, which "represented the first serious intrusion of academics into the history of Shakespeare's reputation" (Taylor 186). The India Act, which stated that the awarding of positions in the Indian civil service would be determined by competitive examination, came to include English as a subject in this examination as of 1855 (Taylor 193-4). By incorporating English into this competitive examination, the subject was declared suitable for academic study and implied that English could be studied alongside science and history. In addition, by 1868 Shakespeare had become a textbook (Taylor 195). In 1870 Parliament created the state school system, and by the late nineteenth century, Shakespeare became a significant part of the study of English literature (Taylor 194).

Dickens himself also promoted a more academic study of the theatre in order to discourage the rowdy playhouse goers. Dickens often attacked the popular theatre, angry about its audience's lack of respect for the drama. In 1851 he co-wrote an article with R. H. Horne titled "Shakespeare and Newgate" in which he applauds Mr. Phelps for turning a playhouse full of fights and "resounding with foul language, oaths, catcalls, shrieks, yells, blasphemies, [and] obscenity" (344) into one in which the members of the audience "have really come to the Theatre for their intellectual profit" (349). Beyond simply diminishing the rowdy chaos of the theatre, Dickens desired a particularly academic approach to this genre. Six years later, in a speech given to toast the trustees of the Royal General Theatrical fund, Dickens says in response to an address given by the chairman, "I particularly sympathized with that portion of it in which he preferred a claim on the part of the stage to be regarded as a powerful and useful means towards the education of the people" (*Speeches* 229). At the end of the same speech, he toasts Phelps, praising him again by saying that he has at his theatre "a body of students behind the curtain, and a body of students before the curtain, striving together to appreciate and extol him" (*Speeches* 231). This combination of Dickens' praise of Phelps' theatre because the people in it have come there for "intellectual profit" and that the people viewing the plays behave like students, implies Dickens' belief that the successful drama depends on this intellectual encounter. In *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare*, Robert Sawyer tells us that Dickens also "elevates reading at home to a production of the drama" (116). Dickens believes that an academic look at drama is essential in order to better appreciate and understand it, encouraging both a study of the written drama and the study of the stage.

As we have seen, in the nineteenth-century Shakespearean drama moves from its place on the stage as popular entertainment into the world of academics, making it prime for incorporating into the novel. In fact, Sawyer writes in the introduction of his work that,

As growing numbers of middle class patrons attended Shakespearean productions, those advocates of a private, cultural Shakespeare on the page grew more and more disillusioned with public Shakespeare on the nineteenth-century stage, so that in one sense, Shakespearean appropriations in novels, poetry, and criticism, was not only the most political, but also the most 'successful' Shakespeare produced during the mid-Victorian period. (15)

Although Sawyer does not specify what he means by "successful" I believe he is referring to the excessive theatricality of the Victorian drama as well as the chaos of the popular theatre which distracted from the real masterpiece of Shakespeare's plays. In the novel, the author can control the play as well as its fictional audience, intentionally allowing a rowdy crowd to interrupt a play, or creating a more refined environment, according to his own desires for his novel.

There are many features that separate the novel from the drama; however, one essential characteristic of the novel and of the play resides at the foundation of both and is a central problem in any work attempting to amalgamate these two genres, namely, that a novel is meant to be read, a play, watched and heard. This presents a distinct problem in incorporating either genre into the other. A play loses its visual aspect when placed in the constructs of the novel, while a novel loses much of its descriptive quality when it is

dramatized, the later being a common complaint voiced regarding theatrical adaptations. Drama is strongly defined by the dialogue of the actors. When reading the script of a play, dialogue is all that progresses the plot, and when the play is performed, dialogue remains the focus, along with some visual aids. We see this particularly in *Great Expectations*, for when Dickens places *Hamlet* within the novel all dialogue is removed and one only hears the action second hand. This reinvents the nature of *Hamlet*, for it is a play meant to be witnessed visually and heard audibly by an audience, but as a reader of a novel, this is impossible. Perhaps this is why Dickens gave dramatic readings of many scenes from his novels, for he recognized the difficulties associated with novelizing a drama and merging these two genres.

This idea of the play being unable to exist in its true form within the novel works conversely, for the play of Hamlet also reveals that the novel cannot be seriously worked into the genre of drama. When Polonius discovers Hamlet reading a book, he asks Hamlet of what he is reading. All that Hamlet can say is “Words, words, words” (2.2.191). In this scene, Hamlet is unable to explain to Polonius the “matter” of the book. It is mere words, for reference to a novel on stage does not allow the audience to enjoy the novel in all its greatness. The novel is meant to be read and cannot be explained through stage dialogue. Because of the nature of the genre of the novel, Shakespeare cannot honestly incorporate the book that Hamlet is reading into the structure of the play.

In *The New York Times* in 1902, there was an article titled “the Novelized Drama” in which the author describes the stage adaptation of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as “incomprehensible.” In this article the author confronts the nature of the novel saying, “In ‘Tess of the D’Urbervilles’ Mr. Hardy has made it clear with delicacy and firmness

that Tess was not responsible for her fall from virtue; but what can be printed with propriety for solitary perusal cannot be spoken before an audience of many hundreds of people.” As the stage adaptation of Tess reveals, because the novel is meant to be read, it is impossible to incorporate it into a drama without diminishing it.

Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed more than read, yet beginning in the Victorian era it became almost as popular to read Shakespeare’s works as to watch them performed. Today this is even more common, for although by the time a student graduates high school he has almost certainly read some of Shakespeare’s plays, he may have never seen a single one performed. Shakespeare found his way into the cannon of *literature* as well as drama, and through Shakespeare on the page we can discover more about the plays themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NOVELISTIC STAGE IN THE DRAMATIC NOVEL

The dramatic influenced many aspects of English life in the nineteenth century. The Great Exhibition and the Crystal Palace provide clear evidence of the Victorian interest in spectacular scenery and large demonstrations. The Victorian stage was no different. Exhibitions of dramatic scenery overwhelmed the stage at this time. Richard Schoch in *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean* writes that in the nineteenth century “popular culture was dominated by a taste for spectacles” (1). Richard Foulkes also discusses the Victorian problem of the conflict between spectacular scenery and cultural purity (*Shakespeare and The Victorian Stage* 5). This extravagant theatre was the most popular public entertainment of the Victorian era. According to Juliet John more people attended the theatre at this time than at any other time in history (48). In 1843, the Patent Theatres Monopoly, which placed restrictions on performing legitimate theatre in the capital, was abolished, allowing the theatre to reach beyond the upper class to the middle and lower classes and allowing the theatre to develop as an even more popular genre. In this chapter I will begin with a discussion of Shakespeare on the Victorian stage as presented by periodicals and Victorian actors of Hamlet and the way that Mrs. Henry Spiker in *David Copperfield* represents such an actor. Then I will continue with a discussion of the *Hamlet* parody in *Great Expectations*, before concluding with a discussion of the unique view of *Hamlet* as presented in *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Although as Prince notes in *Shakespeare in Victorian Periodicals*, one cannot judge the extent of Shakespeare’s popularity based solely on periodicals because we do not actually know how many people read the articles (10), the periodical can teach us the facts associated with Shakespearean performance. Victorian periodicals are filled with

reviews of *Hamlet* performances and discussions of Shakespearean actors. *The Theatrical Observer* and *The Theatrical Journal* in particular contain numerous articles discussing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* on the stage, which reveal the various aspects of *Hamlet* that appealed to the Victorian theatergoer. One critic who disliked a *Hamlet* performed by Charles Kean writes that "His forte was rather the representation of passion than of character" (J.E.S. 161-2). The Victorian theatergoer enjoyed *Hamlet* not just for its theatricality but for its depth of character as well. This article ends with a bit of praise for Samuel Phelps, another famous Shakespearean actor, who I will turn to next.

Theodore Fontane, a German writer, discusses in detail a performance of *Hamlet* starring Samuel Phelps which he attended in the 1850s. Fontane worked for a press agency set up in London and collected his writings on Shakespearean productions in his book *Shakespeare in the London Theatre*. Although his main focus in his reviews is to compare the English theatre to the German theatre, his opinions give us a more objective look at the Victorian stage and in particular Samuel Phelps. In the extended section on Phelps' performance of *Hamlet* he describes Phelps as giving the impression of "deep and unending anguish" (131 n9). As for *Hamlet*'s first three main soliloquies, Fontane expresses disappointment, saying that they lacked passion (63). However, during the "Mousetrap" scene, when *Hamlet* attempts to verify the ghost's accusation that his uncle murdered his father by reenacting a theatrical version of it, Fontane's opinion of the performance suddenly improves, and he writes, "Mr. Phelps had saved all his vocal power and mental energy until the mid-point of the play, and the sudden, wild crescendo of the shout of triumph that broke from him has such an effect on me that I forgot I was in a theatre and sat staring at the whole scene as though it were really happening" (64).

Besides Phelps, another well-known actor of Hamlet in the nineteenth century was Charles Fetcher. Fetcher grew up in France and was a favorite there for over a decade before he came to perform in England (Buell 84). Fetcher and Phelps actually had quite a dispute at one point when Fetcher, who had offered Phelps a contract to work with him at his theatre, cast him as King Hamlet's ghost. John Coleman, author of *The Memoirs of Samuel Phelps* published in 1886 recounts the conversation to us following Fetcher's question as to what part Phelps will play:

“Why Hamlet, of course,” he replied.

“Oh! but I play Hamlet myself,” responded the Frenchman.

“The d—l you do!” growled Phelps.

“Yes! So I thought, perhaps, you would play the Ghost!”

“You though I would play the ghost to your Hamlet—yours! Well d—n your impudence!” (242)

Phelps reveals here the celebrity of Hamlet and way people held him above all other Shakespearean characters. Even though Phelps was unwilling to give over his place as Hamlet to Fetcher, it is evident from a variety of sources that audiences admired Fetcher for his performances of this role. When Fetcher first performed Hamlet a year after he came to England, the performance had a run of 115 nights at the Princess theatre, revealing the warm welcome he received on the other side of the Channel (Buell 84). In his book *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, George Henry Lewes provides many reviews of performances of *Hamlet*, Fetcher's being one of them. Lewes writes that he thought “his Hamlet was one of the very best” (131).

Another actor which Lewes discusses is Macready, a slightly earlier but equally famous Hamlet. He first performed as Hamlet in 1821 and performed in this role 85 times in London by 1851 (Buell 56). Although Lewes says of Macready, “I thought his Hamlet bad” (35), it is not for lack of effort. In *Hamlets of the Theatre*, Buell tells us that Macready was never completely satisfied with his performances of Hamlet and constantly endeavored to improve it through study and attention (56). Lewes attributes his disappointment in Macready to him being “lachrymose and fretful: too fond of a cambric pocket-handkerchief to be really affecting; nor, as it seemed to me, had he that sympathy with the character which would have given impressive unity to his performance” (35). Many others enjoyed Macready’s performances though, as seen in periodical reviews. In *The Examiner* on October 11, 1835, one reviewer writes that he had never seen “such a grasp of thought, never such a sustained exhibition of a single, profound, and enduring passion....The impassioned and heartbreaking sorrow with which Macready opened the play in the first soliloquy was a noble foundation for the entire structure of the character” (“Drury Lane” 644). The critic concludes the article by declaring the performance “the most perfect achievement of the modern stage—in depth, in originality, in truth, in beauty, and in grandeur of SUSTAINMENT” (645). This author could not emphasize enough the brilliance of Macready’s performance. So although Lewes disliked this tremendous, passionate sorrow of Macready’s Hamlet, this same characteristic appealed to other theatergoers.

From all these assessments of various performances of *Hamlet*, a common theme appears, that of passionate acting. Perhaps *Hamlet* was so popular among many Victorian theatergoers because it appealed to their enjoyment of spectacles. Hamlet, as a

character full of conflict and seeming to verge on the boarder of insanity, makes him particularly susceptible to a dramatic performance. Lewes enjoyed Fetcher's Hamlet because of the way he avoids the melodramatic. He says of Fetcher's acting style that it "keeps as far away as possible from the conventional declamatory style, which is by many mistaken for idealism only because it is unlike reality" (132). Lewes admires the way Fetcher "attempts to be *natural*" (132).

Although Lewes himself prefers the natural acting style of Fetcher, he reveals the popularity of the dramatic, spectacular theatre. Besides reviewing particular actors of Hamlet, Lewes describes in his book how the play *ought* to be acted. On the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy Lewes writes, "The speech is passionate, not reflective; and it should be spoken as if the thoughts were *wrung* from the agonies of a soul hankering after suicides as an escape from evils, yet terrified at the dim sense of greater evils after death" (142). Lewes states that he prefers a more natural acting style, yet this description of what Hamlet ought to be still elevates a very passionate and dramatic form of acting. This agony, this passion, epitomizes the dramatic nature of the popular Victorian theatre.

In *Great Expectations* we also receive a discussion of how to act from the owner of the playhouse where Mr. Wopsle performs the part of Hamlet. The owner of the playhouse critiques Mr. Wopsle's performance saying:

But I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Waldengarver...You're out in your reading of Hamlet when you get your legs in profile. The last Hamlet as I dressed, made the same mistakes in his reading at rehearsal, till I got him to put a large red wafer on each of his shins, and then at that rehearsal (which was

the last) I went in front, sir, to the back of the pit, and whenever his reading brought him into profile, I called out “I don't see no wafers!” And at night his reading was lovely. (257)

Again we see this unnatural style of acting which Lewes dislikes. The owner here describes an acting style which is very strict and posed, the opposite of anything natural. Obviously Mr. Wopsle's poor performance was not simply due to being “out in his reading” by standing in a profile position. Not only does Dickens critique Mr. Wopsle's rendition of Hamlet, as I will discuss in just a moment, he even critiques the critic who sees the only thing wrong with Wopsle's performance is that he stands in profile.

In *David Copperfield* we receive a description of a character that encourages one to analyze these Victorian actors of Hamlet which I have just discussed. This description appears in chapter twenty-five when we meet Mrs. Henry Spiker. Before we even learn her name, Copperfield compares her to Hamlet. He says he remembers her “as looking like a near relation of Hamlet's—say his aunt” (348). Just before this comparison, David describes her looks to us saying that she was “a very awful lady in a black velvet dress, and a great black velvet hat” (348). The looks of this woman on first seeing her, not her personality on getting to know her, strikes David as being like that of a near relation of Hamlet. In addition, he goes beyond simply stating that he reminds her of someone who would have been Hamlet's aunt, he actually uses it as her name, truly creating her as Hamlet's aunt. In fact we never learn Mrs. Henry Spiker's first name. In all the dialogue which Copperfield recounts to us she is only “Hamlet's aunt.” Hamlet's aunt said this; Hamlet's aunt answered that. The only time in the chapter, besides when other characters

talk about her, that the name “Mrs. Henry Spiker” is used is the single time that David mentions it in telling us who Hamlet’s aunt is. Other than that, outside the quotation marks of other characters’ dialogue, we only read the name “Hamlet’s aunt”.

The first issue that this unique reference to Hamlet brings up is whether it is more important that Mrs. Spiker is like “a near relation of Hamlet’s,” or specifically his aunt. To specifically say his aunt brings to mind his uncle. Hamlet’s aunt would either be a sister to this evil uncle, a wife to him, or could even be his mother, for as Hamlet says in act two, scene two “my uncle-father and *aunt-mother* are deceived” (emphasis added, 13). Hamlet also brings up his twisted relations when he talks with this uncle just before departing for England. Hamlet says to him, “Farewell, dear mother,” to which his uncle replies, “Thy loving father, Hamlet.” Hamlet then responds, “My mother: father and mother is man and wife; man and wife is one flesh; and so, my mother” (4.3.49-52).

However, the way in which David first presents Mrs. Spiker to us implies that most important is her being a general relation of Hamlet’s, for he first declares this comparison and then almost haphazardly chooses that she should be an aunt. Because David’s first reaction is that she is like a near relation of Hamlet, I believe Mrs. Spiker reminds him of a female version of Hamlet.

When we look at images of Hamlets from the Victorian era, we can see some of the connections between these actors and Mrs. Spiker. Although there are many photographs, drawings, and paintings of various performers of Hamlet wearing dark clothes, they do not go to the extreme that we see in the character of Mrs. Spiker. William Buell, author of *Hamlets of the Theatre*, the book from which I draw my images, provides us a picture of Edwin Booth in what he declares “his distinctive Hamlet

costume” (Buell 71).¹ In this black and white photo, the costume is dark, but it does not appear to be solidly black. His white cloak also lightens his look. Although he wears a hood, it also is not black and does not give us the impression of “a great, black velvet hat” that Mrs. Spiker wears.

With Edwin Forrest, however, we see a much darker look. In Buell’s book Forrest wears black leggings, a black tunic, and a black cloak. Even his dark hair and beard add to the dark look to which Copperfield seems to be referring.

As we see in David’s association of Hamlet with a distinctive look, these images of Hamlet which people observed on stage did much to influence people’s opinion of the famous character, for it became the picture in their mind that they would associate with Hamlet each time they came across his name. A Hamlet who dressed in mismatched clothing emphasized his feigned (or unfeigned depending on the actor’s or director’s opinion) madness, while wearing all dark clothing which would accentuate his brooding nature.

As we see through the variety of actors who played the part of Hamlet, *Hamlet* was a very popular play. In *Hamlet and the Visual Arts* Alan R. Young makes an interesting point regarding this popularity, namely its unavoidable result that it could be effectively burlesqued (346). In fact, he says that burlesques of Shakespeare were so common in the nineteenth century that they became a subgenre all their own (347). I could spend an extensive amount of time discussing the numerous *Hamlet* burlesques, but for my purposes I am going to focus on one in particular, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, which Stanley Wells declares the “apogee of burlesques” (303). It first appeared in the

¹ The reproductions of the images mentioned here and in what follows can be found in the appendix.

periodical *Fun* in 1874. The mere fact that it appeared in a periodical before being performed on stage, which did not happen until 1891, reveals a shift towards the written Shakespeare and the novel, as I mentioned in the prelude.

Stanley Wells argues that the comedy of this drama focuses more on commenting on interpreters of *Hamlet* than on an actual critique of the play (303). I would argue that this play goes beyond poking fun at scholars, though, to reveal more serious concerns of the time. Perhaps when Wells stated that the play commented on critics of *Hamlet* he was thinking of a portion in the first tableau in which Guildenstern and Ophelia discuss whether Hamlet is really mad. When Guildenstern states his opinion that Hamlet's madness is real, Ophelia responds in a way that epitomizes the conflict between Victorian critics over this same issue. She says,

Some men hold

That he's the sanest, far, of all sane men---

Some that he's really sane, but shamming mad---

Some that he's really mad, but shamming sane---

Some that he will be mad, some that he was ---

Some that he couldn't be. But on the whole

(As far as I can make out what they mean)

The favourite theory's somewhat like this:

Hamlet is idiotically sane

With lucid intervals of lunacy. (80)

Especially in saying that "as far as I can make out what they mean," Ophelia reveals that she is not expressing her own conflict on the subject but that of other commentators. We

see this conflict over whether Hamlet feigned his madness or not in the many periodical articles on this subject. In 1857 Dickens himself wrote one such article titled “Touching the Lord Hamlet” attacking anyone who could possibly believe Hamlet’s madness real and returning to Saxo-Grammaticus, Shakespeare’s main source for *Hamlet*, as evidence of Hamlet’s sanity. Dickens wrote a follow up to this article which he titled, “Re-touching the Lord Hamlet,” and in this article he restates his same argument using another source for *Hamlet*, *The Hystorie of Hamblet* by Thomas Pavier, as evidence again of Hamlet’s sanity. Both these articles primarily summarize these sources in order to educate readers on the sources of *Hamlet* to show that Shakespeare intended Hamlet’s madness to be feigned.

This argument over the interpretation of Hamlet’s madness reveals the desire of many critics to know what an author intended in his work. They did not seem to want plays which left ideas open for interpretations. Many expressed a desire to know exactly what the author or playwright meant and the “facts” of the matter. This focus on facts can be seen in the establishment of The New Shakespeare Society in 1874. According to Gary Taylor, author of *Reinventing Shakespeare*, the purpose of this society was to ascertain the chronology of Shakespeare’s plays, and they attempted to do so by a close study of “metrical and phraseological particularities” (165). They hoped this technical study of language would allow them to understand the progress of Shakespeare’s own mind and thereby learn the order in which he wrote his plays (165). This society truly shows a reliance on facts for they approached their study of Shakespeare very scientifically, avoiding subjective judgments of his works and focusing solely on these mathematical evaluations of his plays. A novel, unlike a play, gives the author an

opportunity to insert his own commentary, leaving less up to the interpretation of the audience and allowing a more factual study of the work. By inserting a play into a novel, the author can comment on a drama in a way he cannot when it is performed on stage. This is mostly due to the characters and the way that the characters guide the plot, and not the other way around in a novel, which I will discuss more in chapter two.

Apart from commenting on *Hamlet* critics as Wells argued, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* also pokes fun at *Hamlet* itself. One aspect of the play particularly satirized in this play is Hamlet's frequent soliloquizing, on which various characters comment. For example, the queen states, in a voice which the stage directions call "appalled," "That means—he's going to soliloquize! / Prevent this, gentlemen, by any means!" (81). Although one cannot deny that Hamlet has a large number of soliloquies, this comic view of them reminds us of the way that the play of *Hamlet* focuses more on words than on plot, establishing it as quite different from most other plays. Perhaps these many words would function better in a novel than in a drama where one would expect a focus on dramatic action and plot development.

Before I begin discussing *Hamlet* within Dickens novels in more depth, let me first discuss his own theatrical associations. In 1845 he created an amateur theatrical company, and he also directed and acted in several amateur plays. Lettis declares Dickens the "undisputed master of...theater" (99). According to Juliet John, Dickens frequently expresses a dislike of *Hamlet*; yet the evidence she uses to support this statement are only Dickens novels, which actually feature the words of the narrator, not distinctly Dickens' opinions. She claims that his non-fiction writings and speeches

support this claim, but she does not cite any sources, and I have not uncovered any particular references to *Hamlet* in these sources throughout my research. Instead, I believe that even in Dickens' transformation of *Hamlet* necessitated by placing it in the novel, Dickens expresses feelings deeper than mere dislike, instead complicating the popular opinion of *Hamlet* and its characters.

So how does one integrate these two ideas, that of the forced transformation of drama when placed within the novel and Dickens love of the theater? More than parodying drama, Dickens was taking advantage of all the traits of drama that he appreciated because of his love of the genre. He believes that every novelist is in a way a dramatist for he must infuse into the novel that energy and passion that frequently permeates a play. In a speech given March 29, 1858, Dickens said,

Every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage. He may write novels always, and plays never, but the truth and wisdom that are in him must permeate the art of which truth and passion are the life, and must be more or less reflected in that great mirror which he holds up to nature. (262)

Dickens endeavored to infuse into his novels not only plays themselves, but also the "dramatic." Dickens' daughter, in *My Father as I Recall Him*, tells us that she observed her father jump up from his chair while working on one of his novels and go to the mirror where he made extraordinary facial expressions while speaking in low tones, after which he immediately resumed his writing (49). This observation conveys to us how even in the writing stages of his novels, Dickens blurred the line between the written word and theatrical performance.

Dickens also tried to bring out this “truth and passion” inspired by drama through his dramatic readings of his novels. His readings reveal to us the superfluousness of the lavish Victorian scenery, for all he would have on stage with him would be “a side shelf for a small pitcher of water, a glass, and a handkerchief,” and yet people came from all around to hear him read (Sawyer 132). In these readings he did not need props, backdrops, or multiple actors, he was simply reading from his novel, revealing its inherent dramatic qualities and the ability of the novel to amalgamate other genres.

Susan Ferguson, in her article “Dickens’s Public Readings and the Victorian Author” writes, “Dickens's readings were not, however, simply public acts of reading aloud in an ordinary reading voice from a book; they were monopolylogues, a staging of a scene of reading that emphasized dialogue and characters” (735). She also says that Dickens’ staged readings were “an idea focused not on the controlling authority of the narration, but on the characters, and particularly the different voices of the characters” (735). In both of these quotes, Ferguson emphasizes Dickens’ dramatizing of his novels. At these dramatic readings the audience itself blurred the distinction between the novel and the drama, for Sawyer tells us that actors and actresses requested Dickens hold a special reading which they could attend, for his readings were usually held while they were working (136). In this way we see the fluidity with which the novel can take on aspects of the drama without being hindered by its restrictive characteristics. So, while Dickens may insert comic references to *Hamlet* into his novels partially because he does not like the character of Hamlet as John claims, Dickens does not necessarily believe that no play can be taken seriously within the novel. However, it is clear that Dickens does believe in the transitory nature of the novel in, for example, his stepping outside of the

typical Victorian bounds of this genre in creating the novel of *Great Expectations* and revealing the ability of the novel to incorporate other genres such as the drama within it. In this novel Dickens not only asserts his opinion of the mutability of the novel through the use of the “sensation” mode but also through the way in which the “hero” of this novel has not “become all that he could become” (Bakhtin 34), as I will discuss in chapter two.

In *Great Expectations*, Dickens presents to us a new stage for *Hamlet*. In a way, he alters the essence of the play by taking a classically tragic story and turning it into a parody. One sees in the actors of Dickens’ parody, evidence of their attempt to create a serious tragedy. Pip admits that he laughed “in spite of” himself (255) for he saw the effort Mr. Wopsle put in to act the tragic part of Hamlet. Although Pip describes the play as “droll” he also declares that he “had a latent impression that there was something decidedly fine in Mr. Wopsle’s elocution” (255). Mr. Wopsle’s elocution perhaps could have obtained the pity of the audience and truly become a tragedy but for the many comic elements Dickens adds to the parody, in particular, the scenery.

Dickens’ very first sentences describing the play are of what would naturally catch the eye first, the comic scenery. The kitchen table serves as a platform upon which the king and queen of Denmark sit in arm-chairs serving as their thrones (253). In this way, Dickens creates a comedy from the outset, for it is not until two pages further on that Pip compliments Mr. Wopsle’s discourse and admits feeling sorry for him in people laughing at him. In using the elements of the kitchen table and chairs, Dickens also domesticates this play which formerly involved the royal characters of Denmark,

removing *Hamlet* from its throne and bringing it down to the level of comedy. According to Flanders in her book *In the Victorian House*, the kitchen was “usually the least regarded room of the house” and served as a bedroom, kitchen, and sitting room (101). In this way, Dickens brings this royal play lower, eye to eye with the common man, allowing a completely free investigation of it.

In lowering the play in this way, Dickens also draws attention to this conflict between noble and ignoble characters. The original Hamlet was a prince, the literally “noble;” yet in Dickens’ version, Mr. Wopsle, a mere church clerk, plays this royal character. The thrones, as I mentioned a moment ago, are reduced to common domestic furniture, void of all marks of nobility. In transforming these aspects of Shakespeare’s play in such a way, Dickens lowers the character of Hamlet to more of a common man and creates a mirror to reflect his own noble and ignoble characters, which I will discuss more in chapter two. Dickens also uses the audience itself to create a comic environment. The audience provides the reader with amusement in their rowdy shouting of “hear, hear!” and in their answers to the questions that Mr. Wopsle, as Hamlet, poses (254).

Yet Dickens’ stage in *Great Expectations* is somewhat distanced from the reader. In fact, when the audience of *Great Expectations* reads the parody of *Hamlet*, they are thrice removed from the play itself. First, they are removed in that the play is being watched by the character of Pip as a young man. Second, what Pip saw is being reinterpreted by the older Pip as narrator. These first two stages are hard to separate from one another. The younger Pip most likely recognized the comical actors and their flaws, and one believes Pip when he says “I laughed in spite of myself all the time,” but less

reliable is Pip's statement that he felt "keenly for [Mr. Wopsle]" (255). In the following scene in which Herbert and Pip converse with Mr. Wopsle, one sees that Pip does not understand as well as Herbert how to react to Mr. Wopsle, for Pip simply repeats everything that Herbert says (257). Because of this, one might wonder whether Pip was actually mature enough at the time to feel pity for Mr. Wopsle. The third obstacle between the reader and the stage is Dickens as an author. In these ways, everything about *Hamlet* has been distanced from the reader and infused with commentary. Drama by nature, however, is meant to be put directly before an audience, and interpretation is left to each individual spectator. One sees in *Great Expectations* that Mr. Wopsle's audience is directly involved in the play, the way Dickens would like the audience to be directly involved in the novel, though perhaps he would prefer a bit more propriety. In response to Hamlet's question as to "whether 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer," Pip tells us that "some [of the audience] roared yes, and some no" (254); in this way Dickens turns the monologue of the drama into the dialogue of the novel, again combining and altering elements of drama for the benefit of the novel.

In order to solve the problematic distance between the reader of *Great Expectations* and the stage of *Hamlet*, Dickens infuses the play with comedy, bringing it closer to his audience. Bakhtin believes that a distanced image cannot become comical, and conversely, a comical image cannot remain distant, for as he says, "Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (23). In this way, by reforming *Hamlet* into a comedy, Dickens allows for a deeper

critique of the play itself as well as the play in relation to *Great Expectations*. In addition, Bakhtin discusses what makes something comical. He writes,

As a distanced image a subject cannot be comical. To be made comical, it must be brought close. Everything that makes us laugh is close at hand, all comical creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity. Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. (23)

By turning *Hamlet* into this comic parody, Dickens allows us to peer at and examine this famous work. We become familiar with Hamlet through the character of Mr. Wopsle and the comedy he inadvertently presents. In the interposing of the author and narrator between the reader and the stage, Dickens does not simply distance us from the stage; he forces the reader into *Great Expectations*, for if the reader remains outside, he will be left behind and unable to adequately understand the depth of Dickens' creation. Dickens despises audiences that do not show appreciation for a work of art, as I discussed in the prelude when he applauds Mr. Phelps for his transformation of the theatre from one full of blasphemies and obscenities into one in which the people attend for intellectual reasons (349). Dickens wanted his audiences to be immersed in the world of his novels, for only then can the audience profit from and appreciate his works. Dickens' aversion to this rowdy play house is also interesting considering his recreation of such a scene in *Great Expectations*. The difference lies in the fact that in *Great Expectation* Dickens is

attempting to incorporate this play into his novel. In order to do so, in order to bring it close so that the audience can examine and interact with it, he must form it into a comedy. On the other hand, when a drama is performed in its natural environment of the stage, there is no place for this disruptive behavior. Dickens chooses to incorporate such behavior and in this way it serves to comment on the theatre and on *Hamlet*, not merely as a distraction from a stage performance. This parody also allows the reader to see more into his opinions on *Hamlet*, the theater, and parody. I believe Dickens is particularly poking fun at Victorian excessive scenery. Lettis tells us that Dickens insisted on a realistic presentation on stage, and “therefore he hated pretentiousness, artificiality, exaggeration, the trite and repetitive, and the merely sensational” (100).

In *Nicholas Nickleby* we are given a very unique interpretation of *Hamlet* on the stage. The name “Hamlet” is only mentioned in one scene in this novel, but that does not make it minor. In fact, this scene which references *Hamlet* proves significant for the incorporation of this play in all of Dickens’ novels. The scene to which I am referring takes place in chapter twenty four when Miss Snevellicci and Nicholas visit the Curdles in order to obtain their patronage for Miss Snevellicci’s bespeak, which is a reservation made by a patron in advance for a specific performance. Mrs. Curdle’s hesitancy to do so arises from her opinion that the theatre is “not in its high and palmy days...the drama is gone, perfectly gone” (300). The conversation which follows contains interesting statements by this couple about both drama and *Hamlet*:

“As an exquisite embodiment of the poet’s visions, and a realization of human intellectuality,...the drama is gone, perfectly gone,” said Mr. Curdle.

“What man is there now living who can present before us all those changing and prismatic colours with which the character of Hamlet is invested?” exclaimed Mrs. Curdle.

“What man indeed – upon the stage;” said Mr. Curdle, with a small reservation in favour of himself. “Hamlet! Pooh! Ridiculous! Hamlet is gone, perfectly gone.” (301)

This reference by Mr. Curdle to Hamlet may seem very small, but it is fraught with meaning, for who would dare to say that Hamlet is gone?! The first significance I want to point out is that way that the Curdles expresses the opinion, common among many Victorian theatergoers, that *Hamlet* is the ultimate drama. As Adrian Poole writes, “if there is a presiding spirit over the Victorian Shakespeare, and what the Victorians made of Shakespeare, it is Hamlet” (8). In this scene in which “the drama is gone, perfectly gone,” Mr. Curdle does not make a new point in stating the same disappearance of Hamlet, he reiterates the same point. “Hamlet” and “drama” have become interchangeable.

The second point I want to make about this scene concerns the significance of the word “gone.” This word could be taken literally in that the Curdles mean that there is literally no more theatre, but this would not make sense. They are aware that theatrical productions still take place; after all, the actress Miss Snellicci sits in front of them requesting their signature for her bespeak. No, the theatre has not vanished; it is just no

longer what it used to be. To the Curdles, the theatre is dead. Bakhtin would argue the same point. He states that genres other than the novel are analogous to dead languages (3). Such languages, like the drama, are not gone, just dead. They have not the freshness and fullness of life they had when they were young and developing.

Mr. Curdles' belief that Hamlet is gone is due to his inability to think outside the strict confines of the stage. He tells Nicholas, "I hope you have preserved the unities, sir" (301), referring to rules for composing the drama developed from Aristotle (808 n4). "The unities are everything," he says (301). These words of Mr. Curdle reveal the static and structured nature of the drama. This fixedness defines the drama as a dead language. As in grammar, there are rules to follow, and these rules are set and final; they will not change a few years from now, for the language is complete.

Yet Mr. Curdle unknowingly shows that the drama and the novel can come to life as a new language. Although he intends in his statement "What man indeed—*upon the stage* (emphasis added) to exclude only himself from the Mrs. Curdle's statement that no one can truly represent Hamlet in all his glory, the statement serves a greater purpose. In light of Bakhtin's theory, we can agree that the drama of *Hamlet*, *Hamlet* upon the stage, is a dead language, but this does not mean that he cannot be brought to life through a new, developing language, the language of the novel. *Hamlet* is dead when limited by the unities of the stage, but when reconceived in a new environment within the novel, he returns to life. Not only does the play come to life in the novel but the character of Hamlet does as well. The hero of Hamlet provides special significance to the novel in the way he functions and in the way he reflects the heroes of novels, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DRAMATIC HERO VERSUS THE NOVELISTIC HERO

According to Bakhtin, the characteristics of the hero in the novel significantly distinguish the novel from other genres. Bakhtin tells us that, “the changes that take place in the temporal orientation, and in a zone where images are constructed, appear nowhere more profoundly and inevitably than in the process of restructuring the image of the individual in literature (33-4). The temporal zone to which he refers here is the boundary between the novel and the high distanced genres, which he discusses just before turning to this topic of characters within these genres. In the section which follows this passage, Bakhtin discusses a variety of characteristics which separate the novelistic hero from other heroes, and I will discuss these as I proceed in this chapter. What I propose goes slightly against Bakhtin’s generalization that the novel hero differs from all other heroes, however. Although I agree that the characteristics of the novel hero which he provides separate it from other heroes, what he does not account for is the possibility that select heroes of other genres might share these characteristics – that a dramatic hero may be a novelistic hero as well. In this chapter I will argue that the character of Hamlet functions more like the hero of a novel according to Bakhtin’s standards and also discuss the heroes of Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Great Expectations* as they relate to Bakhtin’s concept of the novel hero as well as to Hamlet.

The hero of a novel is not structured in the same way as the hero of other genres. According to Bakhtin, because one of the fundamental distinctions between the novel and the drama is the character of the hero, Pip, as the hero of a novel, ought to be much different than Hamlet, the hero of a play. Bakhtin writes, “One of the basic internal themes of the novel is precisely the theme of the inadequacy of a hero’s fate and situation to the hero himself. The individual is either greater than his fate, or less than his

condition as a man” (37). Hamlet was considered by many to be the ultimate human character and in this way predictably structured. Jonathan Bate states, “The presence of Hamlet in Romantic discourse usually indicated the artist is examining his own self” (19). Hamlet was popular because he was the “Everyman.”² Almost every person seemed to see himself in the character of Hamlet. He was easily pitied and stereotypically heroic. It was precisely this stereotypicalness of Hamlet as a character that Dickens disliked. As John says in her article “Dickens and Hamlet,” the “glamorization of Hamlet...disturbed Dickens” (46). Dickens believed there was much more to *Hamlet* than its tragic hero (John 55). He was instead interested in the heroes of novels, heroes he could create outside of the structure present in other genres. The hero of a novel differs from that of a drama because he is part of a still developing genre and therefore does not possess this same type of character. The hero of structured genres “has already become all that he could become,” Bakhtin writes (34). The hero a novel never truly becomes all that he can be, for as a novel is “living” so the heroes must always be living and growing. Hamlet’s death prevents him from becoming more, but had he lived on, his potential would be limitless.

Hamlet is a very unique hero in that he functions more like a novel hero than the hero of a drama. A periodical article published in 1873 reveals many Victorian assumptions associated with *Hamlet* and points out one way in which Hamlet differs from all other Shakespearean dramatic characters. The author begins this article by asking, “Why is it that we look upon Hamlet as being none other than Shakespeare himself” (279). This article, titled “The Lost Hamlet,” focuses in the later half on

² Juliet John writes in “Dickens and Hamlet” that in the nineteenth century “Hamlet thus becomes not so much the archetypal intellectual but simply archetypal – Hamlet as Everyman” (47).

alternate versions of *Hamlet*, which he believes originally came from Shakespeare; however, the first half discusses this idea of Hamlet as Shakespeare, making him the ultimate Shakespearean character. The author tells us that the reason “we” view Hamlet as a biographical representation of Shakespeare is because of the perfection of his character. All of Shakespeare’s other characters are “mere working characters” and are “plot-ridden” as he calls it (279). By this he means the plot which surrounds them in their play limits their characters. In *Hamlet*, though, the plot serves Hamlet, not the other way around (280). Hamlet “soar[s] above the plot” (280). This idea that plot does not weigh down Hamlet creates him as more similar to a novel hero who possesses a more developed character than many theatrical characters who function primarily to progress the plot on the stage. Bakhtin says that familiarization of characters is necessary in order to put them into the novel, and in consequence of this “they [have] ceased to be exhausted entirely by the plots that contain them” (35). Hamlet, like this novel hero, is not exhausted by his plot but rises above it.

In *David Copperfield*, Micawber indirectly expresses this idea of Hamlet not being tied down by plot. In his prepared letter in which he confronts all of Uriah’s frauds he reads, “As the philosophic Dane observes, with that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan Era, worse remains behind!” (706). First of all, Micawber points out the universality of Hamlet as a philosopher. As a philosopher, Hamlet is more concerned with dialogue than with story, preventing the plot from restricting him. Bakhtin writes that “The fundamental condition, that which make a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the *speaking person and his discourse*” (332). This discourse is an essential part of Hamlet, forming him into

more of a novel character than that of a drama. The excessive amount of soliloquizing by Hamlet, although made fun of by characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* as I mentioned in chapter one, allows the character of Hamlet to be more easily appropriated into the novel, for his universal truths speak to many situations. Micawber also reveals the widespread knowledge of Hamlet, for similar to the opening of chapter thirty one in *Great Expectations* where we find ourselves “in Denmark” (253) and automatically know we are watching a scene from *Hamlet*, Micawber needs only to refer to Hamlet as the “Dane” for us to know of whom he is speaking.

In “The Lost Hamlet,” the author also invents an abstract idea which he calls the “Hamlet note-book” (280), a sort of journal Shakespeare kept full of Hamlet-like broodings. This notebook is filled with Hamlet’s thoughts such as “to be or not to be.” The author invents this idea of the Hamlet note-book in order to account for some of the musings of other Shakespearean characters who he considers lesser than Hamlet. For example, he says that Claudio himself could never have uttered the famous lines, “Aye, but to die and go we know not where, / To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot!...” (280). Instead, these lines, the author claims, must have come out of the Hamlet note-book, for only a character of Hamlet’s caliber could have uttered such thoughts. He goes on to cite quotes from Macbeth, Prospero, and other famous Shakespearean characters, as excerpts from the Hamlet note-book. The author claims that the reason these quotes express themselves through other characters is that Shakespeare was overburdened with these philosophizings. Shakespeare crammed as many into Hamlet as he could, but the

remaining he tosses “indiscriminately into other plays” such as *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* (280-1).

Hamlet, according to this author, rises so far above these mere working characters that the only wise words they can say are actually Hamlet’s, placed in their mouths by Shakespeare because he was so burdened with these brooding thoughts that they expressed themselves in other characters. In attributing all the famous lines of other characters to Hamlet, this author further emphasizes the Victorian theatergoer’s obsession with *Hamlet* above and beyond all of Shakespeare’s other plays, for any great speech given by a character other than Hamlet he attributes to a spilling over of Hamlet’s character into other, lesser characters.

Charles Cowden-Clarke, a literary critic from the nineteenth century, provides further insight into Victorian views of Hamlet as a character, and focuses on this idea of Hamlet as a philosopher as well. Cowden-Clarke is well known for a series of lectures on Shakespearean characters which he gave beginning in 1834. The lectures were so popular that he received many letters requesting he put them into print. In 1863 he finally did so, publishing the collection of his lectures under the title *Shakespeare’s Characters*. In *Shakespeare’s Characters*, he devotes a chapter to *Hamlet* based on the lectures he gave on this play earlier in his life. In this chapter he spends some time with each of the main characters of this play but focuses on Hamlet for a majority of it. He describes Hamlet as the “prince of all poetical philosophers,” moralizing and philosophizing almost unconsciously (63-4). He also declares that Hamlet is not didactic; his reflections are primarily for himself (63). Although Hamlet does not intend us to

learn lessons from his reflections, his universal truths speak through the characters of Dickens novels and teach us about humanity and about ourselves. This peering into himself, this obsessive reflection, also separates Hamlet from the typical dramatic hero, for it emphasizes his freedom from plot and his connection with the novelistic hero. As Cowden-Clarke puts it, Hamlet's story is one of conflict between "determination and irresolution arising from over-reflection" (91). This excessive philosophizing of Hamlet makes him particularly suited for adoption into the novel, for it allows his character, as well as the play as a whole, to be re-written and adapted to a variety of situations.

Dickens re-writes the play as a whole through *Great Expectations* when he inserts his parody of *Hamlet*. Through this scene he gives us more insight into the characters of his novel by fusing comedy with tragedy. As I discussed briefly in chapter one, in the parody of *Hamlet* Dickens adds comedy to the scene through the scenery and the active audience. Dickens takes the original, tragic *Hamlet* and re-forms it into a comedy, blurring the line between these categories and encouraging us to explore these themes elsewhere in the novel. He particularly mixes these themes through contrasting characters within the novel. One sees this combination of comedy and tragedy in *Great Expectations* most clearly after applying Aristotle's definitions of these dramatic themes to the novel. In his *Poetics* Aristotle writes, "It is through the same distinction in objects that we differentiate comedy and tragedy, for the former takes as its goal the representation of men as worse, the latter as better, than the norm" (II, 20-4). He further defines comedy saying, "As we have said, comedy is an imitation of baser men. These are characterized not by every kind of vice but specifically by "the ridiculous" (V, 1-3).

Leon Golden, in commenting on Aristotle's definitions, says that tragedy represents noble characters and comedy ignoble ones (286). Through the variety of characters Dickens employs, the reader sees both sides of humanity, the noble and ignoble. In Pip one sees a selfishness that represents a more ignoble side of man, such as when Pip neglects to visit Joe after returning to Miss Havisham for the first time after moving to London. Pip says, "But I never thought that there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe....It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes; they had soon dried, God forgive me! soon dried" (244). Now if Pip's selfishness had serious consequences, this aspect of his character might have been tragic, but seen in light of the positive ending of the novel, this selfishness of Pip actually adds Aristotelian comedy.

In Herbert, on the other hand, one sees the more noble side of humanity, which adds a bit of tragedy to *Great Expectations*. Towards the close of the novel, Pip begins to realize the superiority of Herbert in comparison to himself. After having worked overseas for Herbert for a few years, Pip muses, "We owe so much to Herbert's ever cheerful industry and readiness, that I often wondered how I had conceived that old idea of his ineptitude, until I was one day enlightened by a reflection, that perhaps the ineptitude had never been in him at all but in me" (480). Herbert shows his noble traits in the great effort he puts into his work and in the cheerfulness with which he does so. Herbert's kind nature could have potentially added tragic elements to this story, but for the happy conclusion. On the other hand, the idea of ineptitude, either in Herbert or in Pip, adds comedy to the novel; it adds "the ridiculous." In addition, this thought of Pip's emphasizes again Pip's selfishness in overlooking Herbert's goodness. Yet even within

each of these characters Dickens conflates comedy and tragedy, for independent of the ending of the novel, Pip's selfishness appears more tragic and Herbert's kindness less so.

Pip is not a stereotypical tragic hero. One sees in Dickens' working notes that he did not view Pip as very heroic at all. Pip refuses to develop or learn from his mistakes until the end of the novel, as the reader sees in Pip as narrator repenting for many mistakes he made as a child and recognizing the greatness of other people around him such as Herbert and Joe. After Joe nurses Pip back to health, Pip realizes that Joe has always been "simply faithful" and "simply right" (467). Dickens writes that "the one good thing [Pip] did in his prosperity, the only thing that endures and bears good fruit" is Pip's choice to go abroad with Herbert and become his clerk (511). Despite all his flaws, Pip is the main character and in this way viewed as the "hero." Yet, this lack of stereotypicalness is exactly what qualifies Pip as a *novelistic* hero. Bakhtin writes, "The hero of a novel should not be 'heroic' in either the epic or the tragic sense of the word: he should combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious" (10). Because it is only in the final few chapters of the novel that Pip begins to recognize his own shortcomings, he remains a child in many ways at the close of the novel and has a long way still to mature. As I mentioned earlier, Bakhtin believes that a novel hero has not "become all that he could become," and we see this clearly in Pip who only begins to understand life and his place in it as the novel closes.

Alongside the idea that the novelistic hero is still developing, Bakhtin also writes that "There always remain in him unrealized potential and unrealized demands. The

future exists, and this future ineluctably touches upon the individual, has its roots in him” (37). This unrealized potential allows Pip to fall prey to the revenge schemes of the characters around him without ever agreeing to do so, and I will go into these revenge schemes more in depth in the following chapter. The future of Pip’s potential reaches him in his nightmare of playing Hamlet in which his great expectations are lost, and the path he thought he was on turns out to be a mirage. In addition, Pip’s future goes on even after the conclusion of the novel. In fact, Dickens wanted to leave the novel even more open ended, but his editors encouraged him to imply a happy ending with Estella in order to please his readers.

Yet, in the character of Hamlet we see that this unrealized potential extends beyond the hero of the novel. Like Pip, this unrealized potential allows Hamlet to fall prey to the ghost’s demands. Hamlet’s uncle recognizes this potential and for this reason plots with Laertes to end Hamlet’s life. Hamlet sees his future and recognizes the need to act; yet in his struggle with his conscience he can never come to know himself fully until he is free of his promise to his father’s ghost. Because Hamlet has so many features in common with the novel hero, he can be easily recreated in the novel, and in doing so, Hamlet lives on as a novelistic hero.

In *David Copperfield* we meet another hero who shares much in common with Hamlet. We see throughout the novel that David, like Hamlet, is obsessed with duty. When his aunt Betsey Trotwood continuously asks David what he wants his occupation to be, he vacillates. All he does know is that “my desire was to apply myself to some pursuit that would not lie too heavily upon her purse; and to do my duty in it, whatever it

might be” (255). He does not know what his duty is, but he desires only to fulfill it. He again express his sense of duty after Ham’s and Steerforth’s death when he says, “I knew that the care of it, and the hard duty of preparing his mother [Mrs. Steerforth] to receive it, could only rest with me; and I was anxious to discharge that duty as faithfully as I could” (748). He anxiously desires to fulfill whatever duty is laid upon his shoulders. It begins to affect him negatively when he uses his somewhat unhappy relationship with Dora as a sort of scourge to keep him on his dutiful path. He tells us:

I had thought, much and often, of my Dora's shadowing out to me what might have happened, in those years that were destined not to try us; I had considered how the things that never happen, are often as much realities to us, in their effects, as those that are accomplished. The very years she spoke of, were realities now, for my correction; and would have been, one day, a little later perhaps, though we had parted in our earliest folly. I endeavoured to convert what might have been between myself and Agnes, into a means of making me more self-denying, more resolved, more conscious of myself, and my defects and errors. Thus, through the reflection that it might have been, I arrived at the conviction that it could never be. (769)

David expresses in this passage his belief in his duty of self-denial. He keeps the misery of his early life close beside him in order to use it as a way to remind him of his obligations in life that must come before his own happiness. As Annette Federico puts it “*David Copperfield* also portrays a person who has lost happiness, or who has had to compromise his happiness to duty, faithfulness, or compassion” (84). Federico neglects

the connection to *Hamlet* in this exchange of happiness for duty though. Hamlet gives up happiness with Ophelia, damages his relationship with his mother, and ultimately loses his own life in this struggle to obey the obligations which his dead father placed upon him.

David does not only act based on duty, though, and when he acts on his own convictions he reveals more about the character of Hamlet as well, for it shows us an alternative life for Hamlet: what he would have been had he taken more control over his destiny. Although David's life is not free from pain and suffering, he chooses his path in life instead of allowing someone to choose for him. After Mr. Micawber and his wife depart, Copperfield decides he must make a change in his life. He drastically changes his fate when in chapter twelve he decides to flee from his job washing wine bottles. He says, "I went to begin my weary day at Murdstone and Grinby's. But with no intention of passing many more weary days there. No. I had resolved to run away—to go, by some means or other, down into the country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to my aunt, Miss Betsey" (164-5). Perhaps if Hamlet had resolved to act on his own beliefs instead of acting at the command of his father's ghost he might not have been such a stranger to action, for he might have lived his life with more personal conviction.

Perhaps it was Micawber's advice to David which encourages him to take his fate into his own hands. In chapter twelve he says, "Never do tomorrow what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time" (163). This statement brings to mind Polonius's long speech of advice to his son Laertes in act one, scene three because of the straightforward proverbial sound of it. What Micawber says to David has much the same sound as Polonius's "Neither a borrower or a lender [be]" (1.3.74) and other phrase of

advice. The message of Micawber's words, although not a direct quote from *Hamlet*, sums up one of the key elements of the play, Hamlet's delayed revenge. Hamlet says in act four, scene four,

I do not know

Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"

Sith I have cause and will and strength and means

To do't. (43-46)

Hamlet admits that he has allowed time to be stolen from him. He does not know why he still has not gotten around to taking his revenge. Perhaps had this same advice been given to Hamlet, the play might have turned out quite differently. It is this thief of time which Micawber warns David not to fall victim. In fact, this advice prevents David from falling into the same tragedy to which Hamlet is prey and urges him to take hold of his own destiny.

Many of the references to *Hamlet* in *David Copperfield* which have I have mentioned throughout this paper occur as subtle allusions. Only a few times in the novel are the characters of Shakespeare's play directly referenced, and we certainly do not get a chapter long presentation of the play as we do in *Great Expectations*, yet these allusions together form a significant part of the novel, for they provide an underlying foundation of *Hamlet* throughout the novel. Taken as a whole, these allusions function as a way to better understand the character of David. Being already familiar with *Hamlet*, the way in which Dickens connects the character of David to that of Hamlet serves to emphasize David's constant struggle with duty and fate. Hamlet struggles with the way that the

ghost of his father has attempted to determine his fate, and similarly David constantly struggles to be the hero of his own story. David opens the novel by saying, “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (1). Like the story of *Hamlet*, *David Copperfield* is the story of the boy trying to control his own destiny in spite of the duties he feels obligated to fulfill.

Hamlet fits all the characteristics of the novelistic hero except one: The play seems to conclude when Hamlet has become all that he could become. Because he is part of a drama, Hamlet as a character must end this way, and the set nature of the drama prevents us from analyzing any other possible fates for the tragic hero. Hamlet himself expresses this idea as he dies, saying:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audiences to this act,
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant Death
Is strict in his arrest) – O, I could tell you –
But let it be. (5.2.318-22)

Because this is but an “act” on the stage, Hamlet must follow the rules of this strict genre. His character still has much to tell, though, and lives on when put into the genre of the novel. Because he possesses all the other characteristics of the hero of the novel such as not being weighed down by the plot, expressing himself through dialogue, and his “unrealized surplus of humanness” (Bakhtin 37), the moment one takes Hamlet off the stage, one extends his future and he becomes all that the novelistic hero is. Only in the

context of the novel can one rewrite Hamlet's environment and come to learn more of his character off of the stage.

CHAPTER THREE

THE APPEARANCE OF KING HAMLET'S GHOST IN DICKENS' NOVELS

Beyond the main character of Hamlet, King Hamlet's ghost also plays a significant role in the play and makes many appearances in Dickens' novels as well, particularly *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*. In "Specters of Dickens's Study" Andrew Miller discusses the way that fictional characters exist alongside ghosts and spirits. His argument focuses on the way that the supernatural brings about feelings of nostalgia and that it allows us to step outside of ourselves and examine our lives from afar. I agree that ghostly figures allow us to examine characters on a different plane; however I believe that the ghost figures in these particular novels arises from King Hamlet's ghost, which Miller does not discuss, and presents a new meaning behind these spirits – a meaning that can only be obtained through the connection with *Hamlet*.

When one is familiar with Shakespeare's sources for the play, particularly Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, the significance of the ghost in both Shakespeare's play and Dickens' novels becomes even more prevalent. As demonstrated by two periodical articles, Dickens evidently read the sources for this play, both Belleforest's and the earlier Norse legend composed by Saxo Grammaticus. As I mentioned in the prelude, in 1857 Dickens wrote an article titled "Touching the Lord Hamlet," followed only two months later by a second article titled "Re-touching the Lord Hamlet." Both these articles discuss the debate among critics over whether or not Hamlet feigned his insanity. Dickens uses these two sources of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to argue that Hamlet was clearly sane for these sources contain no touch of insanity, and therefore there should be no question over Hamlet's state of mind.

Because Dickens was familiar with these sources of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he would be aware that in these sources there is actually no ghost who commands Hamlet to revenge his father's death by murdering his uncle, although Belleforest's story does contain many supernatural elements which probably inspired Shakespeare's addition. In Belleforest's version of *Hamlet*, Hamblet, the character on which Shakespeare bases his Hamlet, witnesses his father's murder. This differs from Shakespeare's version in which Hamlet gains this knowledge from the ghost. Hamlet constantly struggles with his conscience because on the one hand he promised the ghost to revenge his death, yet on the other hand he does not feel he has the authority to right this wrong. Hamblet does not struggle with his conscience in the same way as Shakespeare's Hamlet, for he acts out of his own desire for revenge and not at the command of another³. Having read this source, Dickens would be aware that this ghost figure does not appear in Shakespeare's sources, and in making so many connections to this figure which brought about Hamlet's struggle with his conscience, Dickens emphasizes the struggles of his characters, such as Pip, David Copperfield, and Ebenezer Scrooge.

In *Great Expectations*, Pip tells us of a nightmare he had involving King Hamlet's ghost. Pip tells us, "Miserably I went to bed after all, and miserably thought of Estella, and miserably dreamed that my expectations were all cancelled, and that I had to give my hand in marriage to Herbert's Clara, or play Hamlet to Miss Havisham's Ghost, before twenty thousand people, without knowing twenty words of it" (258). Directly after

³ I expand this idea of Hamlet's struggle much further in an essay titled "Crawling between Earth and Heaven": Hamlet's Struggle with Conscience"

watching Mr. Wopsle's rendition of Hamlet, Pip's thoughts turn to a fear of this ghost, connecting his lost expectations Hamlet's own fate influenced by his ghostly father.

In this nightmare Pip is being forced to "play Hamlet to *Miss Havisham's ghost*" (emphasis added), making a direct connection between these two characters. This represents only one of many allusions to the ghost of King Hamlet contained in this novel, and references to the ghost are as common as references to Hamlet himself. In fact, according to *Literature Online*, *Great Expectations* contains 25 references to the word "ghost" and its variants. It is particularly interesting that Dickens makes use of the character of the ghost because in the Shakespeare's play it is the ghost who brings the conflict to the character of Hamlet and jump-starts Hamlet's struggle with his own conscience. In this plethora of allusions to King Hamlet's ghost, Dickens draws our attention to the more serious elements of his novels, for it is the ghost in *Hamlet* who inspires the serious soliloquizing of the play's hero.

In addition, because this reference to the ghost comes from Pip as narrator, we are more aware that the ghost exists as a result of his own character. In *Hamlet*, the ghost is seen by more people than just Hamlet; indeed, even if other characters did not see the ghost, the audience still would. In the novel, however, the ghost can remain as part of Pip without being subjected to other characters.

Dickens also emphasizes this idea of Miss Havisham as a ghost figure in the language he uses to describe her. When we first meet Miss Havisham, like a ghost she is dressed in clothes "all of white." (57). Pip tells us that her shoes, veil, and even her hair are white. Yet, like death, all these whites have faded to a dusty yellow, old with age. Pip recognizes the ghostliness of this scene as he tells us, "Now, waxwork and skeleton

seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked about me. I should have cried out, if I could” (58). This skeleton, covered in white shrouds, instills extreme fear in the young Pip. A few chapters later, Pip enters a new area of the house, one in which “every discernable thing...[is] covered in dust and mould, and dropping to pieces” (84). This dust-covered room adds to the ghostly nature of all that surrounds Miss Havisham. Later on in the novel as well, while in Satis House a more mature Pip tells us that as he looks around “at the stopped clock, and at the withered articles of bridal dress upon the table and the ground, and at her own awful figure with its ghostly reflection thrown large by the fire upon the ceiling and the wall, I saw in everything the construction that my mind had come to, repeated and thrown back to me” (303). Later in the novel, Pip sees Miss Havisham in all her ghostly wonder. Only after Pip learns of the revenge plot of Miss Havisham of which he has been a part, does he truly understand her ghostly figure.

Like King Hamlet’s ghost, Miss Havisham, in a way, commands Pip to take revenge for her, only he remains unaware of his task. In chapter twenty-two we learn from Herbert that Miss Havisham brought up Estella “to wreak revenge on all the male sex” (177). This revenge forms one of the key plots of the story. Although it may seem that *Estella* is Miss Havisham’s means of revenge, without Pip she could not carry out her revenge either. Her goal is not to take her revenge *on* Pip, but to use Pip to take revenge on all men, just as King Hamlet uses his son to carry out his revenge for him.

The other significant portion of the passage about Pip’s nightmare is that part of Pip’s fear arises out of not knowing his lines in playing Hamlet. Pip himself is an actor in a sense, for Dickens as the author directs him. Many times throughout the novel

Dickens reveals how Pip is an unconscious actor in his life just as an actor on the stage. Dickens calls the sections of *Great Expectations*, not “parts” or “books” but “stages” of Pips life. Although “stage” could refer to various types of stages, Dickens would not have been ignorant of the dramatic stage. In this novel there are stories going around Pip on stage and in which he is acting but of which he is completely oblivious. He is an actor in a multitude of people’s stories, as well as in his own story of his development from a mere actor on an unknown stage to one who chooses his own path in life and not one set down for him by a director. Just as Hamlet’s development revolves around his own desire for autonomy, a desire to act from his own convictions and not solely at the command of the ghost, so Pip’s development revolves around him gaining his independence from these “stage directors” who try to use him to play out their own stories. Yet in the lines that Dickens *does not* write for Pip in his nightmare, Dickens reveals this uniqueness of the genre of the novel in that a lack of dialogue is just as significant as the presence of dialogue, whereas a drama cannot function without it.

As the hero of a novel, Pip’s potential is almost limitless, but he is a very different character from that of an actor. Pip does not realize that he actually is an actor in someone else’s play. Both Miss Havisham and Magwitch, who I will discuss in a moment, are using him to carry out their revenge. As a character from a novel, Pip feels out of place on the stage, particularly on a stage which he did not choose to be on. Unlike Mr. Wopsle who takes on the persona of Mr. Waldengarver when he acts on stage, Pip does not have an alternate personality which he can assume in order to survive on stage. In addition, in telling us of Pip’s fear of forgetting his lines, Dickens, through Pip, draws our attention to the interaction of dialogue between the page and the stage.

Pip cannot remember his words in his dream of being on stage because his nature differs so much from that of a hero in a drama. Pip reveals his inability to resort to the world of the stage and can only satisfactorily express himself on the page.

Miss Havisham is not the only ghost figure in *Great Expectations*. Magwitch also plays King Hamlet's ghost as Mr. Wopsle points out to us in chapter forty seven. In this chapter Mr. Wopsle says to Pip after Pip attended another one of his performances, "I had a ridiculous fancy that he must be with you, Mr. Pip, till I saw that you were quite unconscious of him, sitting behind you there like a ghost" (385).

Here we see again this connection between Pip's "great expectations" and Hamlet's tragedy, for like Miss Havisham, Magwitch takes advantage of Pip's innocence in order to take his revenge. Interestingly, only Mr. Wopsle sees the ghost of Magwitch; Pip himself remains ignorant of his presence. Just as Pip was unaware that Magwitch sat behind him, he remains ignorant that Magwitch is his true benefactor, bestowing wealth on him unknown. Like King Hamlet's ghost, Magwitch leads Pip down a path which Pip does not choose for himself. In *Hamlet* the ghost forces Hamlet to swear to revenge his murder, obligating him to do so. Likewise, Magwitch uses his money, something that Pip cannot resist, to lead him, unconsciously, down his path of revenge.

Magwitch's main desire is not to thank Pip for his good deed as a young boy but to revenge himself on the bourgeoisie. Although one could perhaps defend Magwitch's actions because of his terrible early life, in connecting him with King Hamlet's ghost we recognize the tragedy which arises when the hero's choices are not his own. In the case of *Hamlet*, Hamlet struggles with revenge because it is not his own revenge that he

attempts to carry out but simply the command of his ghostly father. As I discussed earlier, the ghost places strong pressure on Hamlet, but it remains the ghost's revenge, not Hamlet's. With Pip, Dickens takes this idea a step further, for Pip unknowingly acts at the command of Magwitch's revenge, making his situation even more tragic. Although Pip remains unaware of Magwitch's "ghost," this does not weaken its effects on him.

None of these revenges, neither Magwitch's, nor Miss Havisham's, nor even King Hamlet's, succeed. William Wilson in his article "The Magic Circle of Genius: Dickens' Translations of Shakespearean Drama in *Great Expectations*" argues that Miss Havisham and Magwitch are self-defeated because they embrace the ideology of a class on which they are in fact trying to take revenge (163). However, I attribute their failure to a much different reason, one that can arise only after understanding these connections between *Hamlet* and *Great Expectations*. What the three revenges of King Hamlet's ghost, Miss Havisham, and Magwitch have in common is that they each employ an actor to carry out their revenge. Only in Belleforest's story do we see a truly successful revenge, for in this story alone does the character take his own revenge. Neither Hamlet nor Pip carry out the revenge of their employers for they both lack the conviction to do so. Because they are detached from the actual situation—Hamlet never actually saw his father's murder, and Pip does not even know about the revenge he is being made to do—neither one can succeed on his path.

Pip's story may initially seem more pitiful than tragically heroic. He is young and naïve; he has no real purpose in life; and his weak character allows him to fall prey to the

revenge schemes of others. Yet when Dickens connects Pip's character to that of Hamlet through his use of the play scene as well as the references to Hamlet and his father's ghost, we can better understand the situation which leads to the sadness in his life and understand that his story is not pitiful but tragically heroic. As we see in Pip's relationships with Miss Havisham and Magwitch, the tragedy of his story lies, not in his own choices, but in his desire to please those around him by consciously or unconsciously following the path they lay down for him.

Ghosts figure even more prominently in *A Christmas Carol*, even to the point of implying that the ghost in *Hamlet* is more significant than Hamlet himself. In the opening chapter of the novel, the character directly references King Hamlet's ghost, saying to us,

If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind. (6)

In this reference to the ghost of Hamlet's father, the narrator connects the ghost of Jacob Marley with King Hamlet's ghost early on in this classic tale. The spectacle of King Hamlet appearing to his son relies on the fact that King Hamlet is dead. In this statement, the narrator implies that the wonder of *Hamlet* relies on the death of King Hamlet, for as he said a moment before, "There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be

distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate” (6). King Hamlet’s ghost, just like Marley’s ghost, begins the story. Without the ghost, there would be no events to relate. Had King Hamlet not told his son of his murder, Hamlet never would have struggled to revenge it.

In fact, this narrator obviously sees the ghost of *Hamlet* as more significant than Hamlet himself, for he here expresses the idea that Hamlet’s mind was weak even before the news of his father’s murder. This opinion is stressed even more strongly in a passage that followed these sentences which Dickens removed before publication. The reference to Hamlet’s weak mind was originally followed by the following discussion of his character. Only one manuscript of *A Christmas Carol* exists and it is housed at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City; however a scanned copy can be viewed online through *The New York Times*, and in that manuscript one can still make out the following lines which Dickens scratched out: “Perhaps you think Hamlet’s intellects were strong. I doubt it. If you could have such a son tomorrow, depend upon it, you would find him a poser” (1). This presents a very unique opinion of the famous character. The narrator places Hamlet in an environment which causes us to question what the character of Hamlet might have been like had he never met his father’s ghost that fateful night.

The language of this passage particularly challenges our opinions of Hamlet. The passage is one of popular, casual language, and for this reason that narrator furtively encourages us to believe that this opinion of Hamlet is what everyone thinks. Because *Hamlet* is so popular, almost everyone already has set ideas about this play. For this reason, it is very difficult to present any new ideas about *Hamlet* on the stage. When people attend a play titled “*Hamlet*” they know what to expect. They already know the

character of Hamlet, and if the director attempts to alter it in any way, the audience will often be disappointed and declare that the director did not hold true to the play. When the play is taken off the stage and placed into the novel, however, the author can do much with the play that the director could not. He can take the play of *Hamlet* and dissect it and reformulate it without any complaints that he is undermining the nature of the play, for the author does not claim to be directing an authentic *Hamlet*. He is writing his own story and merely using this renowned character for his own ends. Sometimes, the author can even make statements about the play or characters within it that make us wonder about our own preconceptions about them. The narrator does exactly this in *A Christmas Carol*. The casual language he uses and the matter-of-fact way he contradicts our ideas of Hamlet cause us to second guess our own opinions, and think for a moment that Hamlet really was of a weak mind. A moment later we catch ourselves, realizing that Hamlet could not have a weak mind for he is the essence of all that is “Shakespeare;” yet the doubt has been established in our mind and cannot be withdrawn.

I do not think that the opinion of the narrator is necessarily Dickens’ opinion; however, I do think that Dickens is trying to shatter our preconceptions about *Hamlet*. I believed that Dickens disliked the way that Hamlet was viewed as the “everyman,” for this limits his character by generalizing it in such a way. By continuing to challenge our beliefs about the character through the comment presented above, Dickens encourages us not to settle for Hamlet as the perfect tragic hero but to continue to analyze the character and the play in new and unique ways.

Like *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield* also mentions King Hamlet's ghost in the very first chapter. Before doing so, though, David first brings up the idea of seeing ghosts in general. David tells us that the nurse declared that because of the day and hour of his birth he was "destined to be unlucky in life" and would be "privileged to see ghosts and spirits" (1). Although David as a narrator looking back on his life claims that he has not seen any ghosts or spirits in his life as of yet, in the story of his life that follows, I say this is untrue. He may not have seen his definition of a ghost, but spirits and shadowy figures surround him throughout his life. In fact, the word "ghost" and it alternates appear nineteen times throughout *David Copperfield*.

The ghost of King Hamlet referenced in the opening chapter of the novel, appears as the doctor who has come to deliver Mrs. Copperfield's baby who, of course, is David. David tells us that the doctor "walked as softly as the Ghost in Hamlet, and more slowly" (9). The ghost of Hamlet's father comes to David six months after his own father's death, again connecting this ghost to a fatherly spirit. The doctor, like King Hamlet's ghost, starts David on his path in life. The story of *David Copperfield* tells the events which unfold after his birth. In the same way, *Hamlet* is the story of the events occurring after Hamlet's father commands Hamlet to revenge his murder. Although the doctor does not specifically influence David's path in life, this connection between these two figures at the opening of the novel, hints at David's struggles inspired by others in his life who attempt to control his destiny.

CONCLUSION

GHOSTS, *MACBETH*, AND THE *HAMLET* LANGUAGE

Amongst all these references to the ghost of King Hamlet in these novels, it is not surprising that often references to *Macbeth* appear along side *Hamlet*. In *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham appears, not only as a ghost, but also as a witch. In the dusty room of Satis house which I discussed in chapter three, Pip tells us “she looked like the Witch of the place” (85). Pip also directly compares Wemmick’s housekeeper to the witches in *Macbeth* and tells us that he recently attended a performance of this play (212). In *David Copperfield*, Micawber quotes *Macbeth* just before *Hamlet*. Micawber says that “Then it was that I began, if I may so Shakespearianly express myself, to dwindle, peak, and pine” (706). This quote comes from act one scene three, when one of the witches says of Macbeth, “Weary sev'n-nights nine times nine / Shall he dwindle, peak and pine” (1.3.22-23). In the context of *Macbeth*, the witches predict the trouble Macbeth will face in his future. In *David Copperfield*, Micawber applies this line to himself saying that after Heep began to favor him for his own malicious ends, he began to “dwindle, peak and pine.” In making such a statement, not only does Micawber compare himself to Macbeth, but in a way he also equates Heep to Lady Macbeth, for it was she that caused this pining in Macbeth. In this comparison, Micawber also brings up the idea that Macbeth is a victim to Lady Macbeth. *A Christmas Carol* also provides many opportunities for comparison with *Macbeth* with all its supernatural elements; for example the three ghosts which could provide an interesting comparison to the three “weird sisters.”

There are a variety of ways one could discuss the joint amalgamation of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in Dickens’ novels. Perhaps one could argue that Macbeth functions as a sort of novelistic hero as well for he also possesses an “unrealized potential” as I

discussed with Hamlet in chapter two. Macbeth could have become a great leader, except that he was too easily led by those around him. This idea also connects these two heroes, for like Hamlet, Macbeth struggles with his conscience because of the demands of those influences that surround him. Like the ghost in *Hamlet*, the weird sisters of *Macbeth* push Macbeth towards an action (like Hamlet, it is a murder), which he is unsure he wants to take. Yet this plot connection also separates these two plays, for the story of *Macbeth* centers on the consequences which follow the murder, while *Hamlet* deals with what happens when one struggles to carry out a murder. In a way, each play represents an alternative for the other hero because of this contrast between action and inaction. The frequent use of *Macbeth* alongside *Hamlet* could also possibly be due to the ways these plays counter one another, such as in the examples above. In addition, *Hamlet* is a wordy, philosophical play with very little action; *Macbeth* on the other hand is full of murder, prophecies, storms, witches, and sorcery. It is the ultimate sensational play. While *Hamlet* appealed to the Victorian theatergoer because of his philosophical nature and amazing representation of human nature, *Macbeth* represents the sensational. Performances of it would have been prone to much dramatic scenery, and like the sensational novel, may have appealed to this audience because of controversial sensationalism. Although, of course, I do not possess adequate room to fully analyze this connection between *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* within these novels, I nevertheless see it as an interesting point necessitating further research.

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to show the ways in which *Hamlet* is transformed within Dickens' novels. The medium of Dickens' works provides a unique

analysis of the interaction of these two genres because of his interest and experience in the theatre. He understood the uniqueness of these genres because, as a playwright and an actor, he intimately familiarized himself with them. Likewise, *Hamlet* proved to be an exception in some ways to Bakhtin's theory on the structure of the drama, for *Hamlet* functions like a novel in many ways, particularly through its hero. When we learn that *Hamlet* proves to be an exception, we understand more about the play itself. Hamlet, as both a novelistic and a dramatic hero can function on a variety of planes. Were he merely a "plot-ridden" static character of the theatre, he could not give us insight into our own lives. He could not act as a mirror to reflect our own struggles. Even though Hamlet acts as a novelistic hero within the play, only in the novel can *Hamlet* as a whole depart from the restrictive stage. As a play, *Hamlet* ends at the conclusion of act five scene two. However, the character of Hamlet comes alive again in the novel, for as a novelistic hero, he has not "become all that he could become." In some of his last words to Horatio, Hamlet says:

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!
If ever thou didst hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world, draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story (5.2.328-33)

Though the play ends, Hamlet remains alive through his story. Although a strict structure limits most plays, Hamlet, as a unique hero, alters the stage on which he acts, allowing the drama to go on after the end comes. *Hamlet* also provides a unique look at how the

drama functions in the novel because of its similarity to the Victorian novel. Bakhtin writes, “The nineteenth-century novel, it is true, created an important novel-type in which the hero is a man who *only* talks, who is unable to act and is condemned to naked words” (334). Hamlet, like the nineteenth century novel, struggles with action. He talks about action, but does not actually act until the conclusion of the play. Like the novel of this time, he is “condemned to naked words.”

On the novelistic stage the novelist can transform *Hamlet* into a variety of alternatives such as Dickens’ domestication of *Hamlet* in *Great Expectations*. When we take a closer look of the heroes of *Hamlet* versus the heroes of these novels, we learn that Hamlet moves beyond the standard dramatic hero. He breaks the bounds of Bakhtin’s theory, representing a sort of novelistic hero even before he appears on the page. Lastly, the ghost of King Hamlet’s father provides Dickens with a character who represents Hamlet’s own conflicted nature. Not only does the ghost add a sensational element to novels, it adds a philosophical element, for without this character, Hamlet would not have had the same struggle with his conscience, and his story as we know it could never exist.

According to Bakhtin, one of the key features of the novel is heteroglossia, or its amalgamation of languages. Bakhtin lists examples of such languages as languages of social groups, of professions, of genres, and of generations (272). I would like to add another language to list. When *Hamlet* exists within the novel a new language is born; I will call it the “language of *Hamlet*.” With this language, characters can make allusions to *Hamlet*, they can quote Hamlet’s soliloquies and tell his story, all with their own (as well as their author’s) agenda in mind. Like the periodical author I discussed in chapter

two who invented the “Hamlet notebook,” the “*Hamlet* language” is the living language of the dead *Hamlet* brought to life by authors such as Dickens as they novelize this formerly limited dramatic character.

When we understand the history of the novel as presented in the theories of Bakhtin, we are better able to analyze and understand the way Dickens has been able to incorporate these many significant references to *Hamlet*. Bakhtin states that studying a drama is like studying a dead language, while studying a novel is equivalent to studying a living language (3). *Hamlet*, as a drama, is like a dead language, but in forming this play into a part of his novels, Dickens brings it to life. *Hamlet* becomes a part of a living language when it appears in the novel, and therefore it can be studied as if it were itself living. As a drama, its critiques may be limited, for one must remain in the confines of the stage in one’s analysis. However, as a piece of a novel it becomes a sort of living, transforming organism and can therefore be analyzed in entirely new ways.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Edwin Forrest as Hamlet



Booth in his distinctive Hamlet Costume (1870's)

Figure 2: Edwin Forrest as Hamlet



Forrest in his later years

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