

Work Cited

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EDWARDS, Gavin. 2020. *The Case of the Initial Letter: Charles Dickens and the Politics of the Dual Alphabet*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Pp. 169. ISBN 9781526146298, Hardback \$120.00. ISBN 9781526146281, eBook \$120.00.

In *The Case of the Initial Letter*, Gavin Edwards traces the multifaceted nature of capitalization across Charles Dickens's works in the context of a century where capitalization was both normalized in texts and expanded in potential meaning. Edwards examines how "capital" meanings arise and evolve in printed texts, and how the relationship between author and printer allows (or suppresses or changes) those meanings. Dickens, with his clout and control over his publications, due to his popularity and financial success, proves an ideal author for a study of this kind.

Edwards begins with a brief history of the transition, around 1820, to standardized capitalization: upper case for proper nouns, the beginning of sentences, the major words in titles. The "dual alphabet", as Edwards calls it — lower and upper case — exists before the printing press, and "Gutenberg took over the practice of beginning all sentences with capitals from an increasingly widespread scribal practice" (11). (A "single alphabet" would be lower case for all words, as promoted by Herbert Bayer at the Bauhaus in the 1920s.) From the mid eighteenth century to the early nineteenth, printers — such as John Smith in *Printer's Grammar* (1755) — reacted to the "typographical instability", the various "hybrid systems in use", and began restricting capitals to "proper names and Emphatical words" (3). As well, there was in Romantic poetry generally a move to a democratic, "typographical levelling", so that even "Emphatical" words were now in lower case. Consider the difference between Heaven and heaven, Man and man, or I and i. To study the "politics" of the dual alphabet in the nineteenth century, then, is to consider not only the turn to a limited use of capitals, but also the potential significance of them after 1820 when they do appear: as we read Dickens's novels we can ask why this word is capitalized and that one is not. The appearance of non-standard capitals would be a distinct choice, and so too a lack of capitals — such as in Augusta

Webster's poems in *Portraits* (1870), which, radically, eschews capitals at the start of lines. Edwards also considers the problem of unheard capitals in public readings by authors, as well as handwritten manuscripts (where the dual alphabet can be fuzzy) and, by the end of the century, typewritten texts (where the cases are markedly contrasting).

The transition around 1820 was neither total nor smooth, but that year can stand as useful marker. In Chapter 2, on the poetry of William Wordsworth and of George Crabbe, Edwards compares Crabbe's *Tales* (1812) with the 1823 edition (retitled as *Tales in Verse*) to show the difference a decade made. Whereas in the 1812, Crabbe used the older "three-part system (italic capital, roman capital, roman lower case)", in the 1823 there are "no italics, and almost all capitals have been removed" (37). In Crabbe's "The Frank Courtship" we can note that historical figures, such as Oliver Cromwell, see their positions of authority cut down, from "Protector" to "protector" (37). (Edwards sees a "link between decapitalisation and decapitation, as though, inspired by the French revolution, London printers set about guillotining the heads off capital letters" [3].) Indeed, the 1823 edition also lowers the capitals for "King", "Sovereign", and "Saint". From these changes, we can deduce the intentionality of either Crabbe or his printer, Thomas Davison, or both, and historicize — in turning from Romantic poetry to the Victorian novel — how Dickens (1812–1870) will approach issues of this kind in his manuscripts as they head to print.

Edwards provides necessary context to understand how printers addressed capitalization with the arrival of the dual-alphabet standard. Printers labored, much as editors still do now, at the mercy of the manuscript, and also dealt with logistical and financial obstacles. Faced with deadlines, and often late author revisions to copy, printers often had to decipher the nature of certain handwritten letters, such as "c", not easily distinguishable between its upper- or lower-case forms. Such is the case with Dickens, who not only changed his mind between drafts (and increasingly so in his late career, as Edwards attests) but was deeply interested in experimenting with typography.

Edwards locates Dickens's interest in capital letters germinating prominently in the 1840s, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) and *Dombey and Son* (1848). Frustrated by his personal experiences while traveling in America, Dickens, in a passage in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, juxtaposes the "Land of Liberty" phrase with "any land will do for me, after so much water" (42). Dickens criticizes the fraudulent nature of the pre-eminent American claim to be the Land of Liberty when the nation uses slavery as a primary mode of economic gain; it is a only a land, hardly a Promised Land. There is also

the breathless “shares” passage in *Chuzzlewit*, which Edwards includes in its entirety, and is worth repeating here as well:

The mature young gentleman is a gentleman of property. He invests his property. He goes in a condescending, amateurish way into the City, attends meetings of Directors, and has to do with traffic in Shares. As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on the Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything. Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares!

(77–78)

As the capitalized “Shares” repeats, its meaning shifts from investments to a (repulsive) character or state of being. For similarly satirical and critical commentary, Dickens uses elevated titles for low characters, such the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist* (1838), and in *Dombey and Son* he ties together economic and typographic meanings with Dombey’s focus on his infant son as a “Son”, a future partner and proprietor in the family business.

Dickens, however, also had difficulties in using capitals for certain effects, as Edwards’s later chapters lay out. Writing for the print shop, Dickens must choose a final line, a final letter, to set to print (at least initially). His various manuscripts vanish from the final product, and if a printer furnishes a new, altered edition later (as often occurred), the process through which that new line or letter emerged is invisible to the reader. Such is the nature of Victorian publication, and for Dickens this seems to have made him increasingly self-conscious about his revisions, with Edwards noting that his later novels feature far more revisions in manuscript (133). Other difficulties Dickens writes himself into: in *Dombey and Son*, for instance, Dickens revises a line where Florence Dombey is a “Daughter”, a capitalization that equates her with the “Son” (Paul) and thereby legitimizes her as a potential partner in the family business. When Florence instead marries and settles into domestic life, she becomes, after revision, a “daughter” (54–67).

One of the most pertinent aspects of Edwards's study is the story of the trouble that Dickens ran into during his career as a public reader, in his attempts at mediating his texts for people listening to him. Aiming for a wide audience, one including the uneducated, Dickens would revise his work for performance. His imagined listener could equate to his semi-literate characters, those who cannot read but find other ways to comprehend or build basic understanding of words. Repeatedly, however, in public readings and speeches, Dickens struggled to convey the effects of his capital letters, which rely on visual literacy, and he could, as a result, rewrite or exclude specific passages that relied on capitalization. This thorny issue is decidedly evident in a comparison of *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions* (1865) and the "version of it designed by Dickens for his public Readings, *Doctor Marigold*" (116). Without the visual text, an audience may not understand that the character's actual first name is "Doctor" (listeners might hear "Dr. Marigold") or that, in a scene where Marigold teaches Sophy how to read, there is a difference between "cart" and (as on the page) "C A R T" — they sound the same. But Marigold is not just teaching vocabulary to Sophy; "he is teaching her how our alphabetic language works" (138). In these instances, Dickens meets the limitations of the transference to a new textual form, where the materiality must be changed in some fashion.

This study of Dickens's career and his experiences with capital letters and reader reception extend superbly to the book's conclusion, which addresses the rise of Modernism. Edwards locates Augusta Webster (her rejection of capitals for start of poetic lines) as a key link between Dickens and writers such as William Carlos Williams and Virginia Woolf, who in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) said that, in looking through the literary tradition, "One began to be tired of 'I'" (154). Woolf's (in Edwards's words) "identification of capital letters with the male and the phallic" is a concluding example, a striking one, of the (gender) politics of the dual alphabet (155).

Some of the material experiences of developing a text are all but lost to us in a digital age where authors rarely have the experience of working with actual printing presses, with their accompanying lower and upper cases of fonts. Alternatively, we possess the means to assemble the stages of textual transference between the roughest of drafts and final revisions and revised editions, to rediscover and better understand the relationships between author and printer, author and text, author and reader or audience. While the triumph of free verse poetry has buried notions of required capitalization, capital letters have lost none of their visual or political significance. Now is a time ripe with "tall talk" on several fronts, when seeing "president" instead of "President" can put us in quandary — trying to discern

meaning and purpose, perhaps finding an author drawing power away from a title and meeting an audience in their social context.

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ALLEN, Heather J., and Andrew R. REYNOLDS, eds. 2018. *Latin American Textualities: History, Materiality, and Digital Media*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. Pp. 263. ISBN 9780816537716, Hardback \$65.00. ISBN 9780816539024, eBook \$65.00.

This book examines textual objects of very different sorts from Latin America, from costume books and publishers' catalogues to a book of photographs of ephemeral graffiti. An introduction, ten central essays, and an afterword describe the question of how to apply the latest approaches in textual studies to works in different media, from different times and places. These include digital approaches to bibliography and sound archives, a careful consideration of the origin of some of the clothing in Guaman Poma's famous manuscript, the use of postcards in Nicanor Parra's anti-poetry, and a smart new approach to the question of the bodies of Jorge Luis Borges's librarians of Babel. It is a book that engages the reader in the questions of textual studies, opens up a wide range of lesser known texts (as well as new approaches to famous ones), and relates the particular objects of study to larger debates in the field.

The introduction by Heather Allen and Andrew Reynolds sets out parameters for the book, interrogating the current state of textual studies on Latin American literature and culture. The editors state at the outset: "we argue that Latin American textual studies should not attempt to reconcile differences between referent and mode of production but rather account for and contextualize these systems of difference and set them apart as rich and essential sites of analysis for understanding historical and literary tensions in the region" (3). They explain that there has been something of a disconnect between textual studies in the English-speaking world and Latin America, and that the volume aims to bring to the attention of English-speaking readers the wealth of textual objects from Latin America in all their cultural complexity. They mention the legacies of colonialism and uneven development, the language barriers between Latin America and the Anglophone north (and in Latin America between speakers of indigenous languages and speakers of Spanish and Portuguese), and certain key concepts in Latin American cultural studies (such as Antonio