

AI Program: ChatGPT

Here are several clean “influence chains” that plausibly run from Shakespeare to Steely Dan. I kept each chain short, concrete, and sourced.

1. Shakespeare → Duke Ellington → Steely Dan

- Shakespeare directly inspired Duke Ellington’s 12-part jazz suite *Such Sweet Thunder* (1957).
- Steely Dan, lifelong jazz-heads, then covered Ellington’s “East St. Louis Toodle-Oo” on *Pretzel Logic* (1974) and paid overt tribute to bebop giants in songs like “Parker’s Band.”

2. Shakespeare → Oscar Wilde → Noël Coward → Cole Porter → (Great American Songbook/jazz craft) → Steely Dan

- Wilde’s work and criticism are steeped in Shakespeare; scholars track persistent Shakespearean references across Wilde’s essays and plays.
- Coward inherits Wilde’s epigrammatic, high-society comedy; he even performed and rewrote lyrics to Porter’s “Let’s Do It.”
- Porter’s *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948) is itself a Shakespeare musical (*The Taming of the Shrew*), cementing this witty, urbane lyric tradition right inside American popular song.
- Fagen/Becker then draw on that Songbook/jazz sophistication (and big-band arrangers) as a core part of Steely Dan’s palette.

3. Shakespeare → Orson Welles → Film noir tone → Steely Dan

- Welles is a major modern transmitter of Shakespeare (stage/film *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Chimes at Midnight*) and a defining auteur of noir (*Touch of Evil*, 1958).
- Steely Dan’s lyric world is routinely described as Chandler/Runyon-esque—i.e., noirish hard-boiled Americana. (See Becker discussing that tone in interviews.)

4. Shakespeare → T. S. Eliot → William S. Burroughs → Steely Dan

- Eliot explicitly grappled with Shakespeare (e.g., “Hamlet and His Problems”; “No! I am not Prince Hamlet...” in *Prufrock*).
 - Critics note Burroughs’ language often echoes/reworks Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.
 - Steely Dan took their name from Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* (the steam-powered “Steely Dan”).
5. Shakespeare → (Shakespeare on stage) → Stratford Festival → Ellington’s *Such Sweet Thunder* → Steely Dan
- A concrete theatrical pipeline: Ellington was prompted by Canada’s Stratford Shakespeare Festival in 1956 to compose *Such Sweet Thunder*—his Shakespeare suite—premiered/recorded in 1957.
 - Steely Dan’s Ellington cover and bebop tributes carry that Shakespeare-via-Ellington lineage into 1970s jazz-rock.
6. Shakespeare → (Western canon/modernist fiction) → Nabokov/Borges → Steely Dan
- Fagen and Becker frequently cite/lampoon the post-Joycean canon—Nabokov and Borges especially—as touchstones for their sly, literate lyrics.
 - Nabokov’s own criticism admires Shakespeare’s tragedies (e.g., *Lear*, *Hamlet*), showing how the Bard’s concerns refract through the modernists whom Dan admired.