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0521641918 - Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters

Lynne Magnusson

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## SHAKESPEARE AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

*Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters*

*Shakespeare and Social Dialogue* opens up a new approach to Shakespeare's language and the rhetoric of Elizabethan letters. Moving beyond claims about the language of individual Shakespearean characters, Magnusson develops a rhetoric of social exchange to analyze dialogue, conversation, sonnets, and particularly letters of the period, which are normally read as historical documents. The verbal negotiation of social and power relations such as service or friendship is explored in texts as diverse as Sidney family letters and Shakespeare's sonnets, merchant correspondence and *Timon of Athens*, Burghley's state letters and *Henry IV Part 1*.

The book draws on ideas from discourse analysis and linguistic pragmatics, especially "politeness theory," relating these to key ideas in epistolary handbooks of the period, including those by Erasmus and Angel Day. Chapters on *Henry VIII*, *King Lear*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Othello* demonstrate that Shakespeare's dialogic art is deeply rooted in the everyday language of Elizabethan culture. Magnusson creates a way of reading both literary texts and historical documents which bridges the gap between the methods of new historicism and linguistic criticism.

LYNNE MAGNUSSON is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Waterloo, where she teaches Shakespeare, discourse analysis, and early modern literature in English. In addition to publishing articles, she has co-edited *The Elizabethan Theatre XI: The Theatre of the 1580s*, *XII: The Language of the Theatre*, *XIII: Actors and Acting*, and *XIV: Women and the Elizabethan Theatre*.

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*To my mother, Gudlaug Magnusson,  
and to the memory of my father,  
Agnar Rae Magnusson*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i>  | ix  |
| Introduction  | i   |
| PART I. THE RHETORIC OF POLITENESS  |     |
| 1 Politeness and dramatic character in <i>Henry VIII</i>                                      | 17  |
| 2 “Power to hurt”: language and service in Sidney household letters and Shakespeare’s sonnets | 35  |
| PART II. ELOQUENT RELATIONS IN LETTERS  |     |
| 3 Scripting social relations in Erasmus and Day   | 61  |
| 4 Reading courtly and administrative letters  | 91  |
| 5 Linguistic stratification, merchant discourse, and social change                            | 114 |
| PART III. A PROSAICS OF CONVERSATION  |     |
| 6 The pragmatics of repair in <i>King Lear</i> and <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>              | 141 |
| 7 “Voice potential”: language and symbolic capital in <i>Othello</i>                          | 163 |
| <i>Notes</i>  | 183 |
| <i>Bibliography</i>   | 208 |
| <i>Index</i>  | 217 |

Cambridge University Press

0521641918 - Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## *Acknowledgments*

In a book that treats the social shaping of early modern texts, it is a special pleasure to acknowledge the persons and communities that have helped to make this text. The book has taken shape, above all, as a rejoinder within the diverse and fractured conversation in Shakespearean and early modern studies between language critics and historicist scholars. In my text and notes I mention specific positions taken by many of the participants in this social dialogue, but here I wish to acknowledge how much I value the diversity and range of scholarship in this field, how much it has stimulated and taught me.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

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