The power of Shakespeare’s complex language – his linguistic playfulness, poetic diction, and dramatic dialogue – inspires and challenges students, teachers, actors, and theatregoers across the globe. It has iconic status and enormous resonance, even as language change and the distance of time render it more opaque and difficult. The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s Language provides important contexts for understanding Shakespeare’s experiments with language and offers accessible approaches to engaging with it directly and pleasurably. Incorporating both practical analysis and exemplary readings of Shakespearean passages, it covers elements of style, metre, speech action, and dialogue; examines the shaping contexts of rhetorical education and social language; test-drives newly available digital methodologies and technologies; and considers Shakespeare’s language in relation to performance, translation, and popular culture. The Companion explains the present state of understanding while identifying opportunities for fresh discovery, leaving students equipped to ask productive questions and try out innovative methods.

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A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO SHAKESPEARE’S LANGUAGE

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PREFACE

For much of the twentieth century, the close reading of Shakespeare's language played a central role in shaping literary education. With a complex array of established concepts and vocabulary to call on, close reading became the calling card of the discipline of English. And at the centre of that practice, Shakespeare's brilliant language routinely served as the testing ground for innovative approaches and the occasion for so many virtuoso interpretive performances. English studies has since opened its embrace to other disciplines and to what for many have seemed more burning issues than how the language works. The focus has often been much more on cultural and political contexts than the linguistic details of Shakespeare's dramatic texts, increasingly on how the plays speak to questions of gender and race, war and religion, or nationalism and colonialism. The traditional methods of formal text analysis appeared to have little to tell us about these issues. Today, however, more than a little paradoxically, we are being called back more and more to the explication of Shakespeare's language, sometimes by admiration, sometimes by incomprehension, sometimes by a recognition that language use or misuse has an active role in constructing cultural phenomena like race and gender, or war and religion. How can the plays speak to us at all if we forget their language?

The power of Shakespeare's complex language both inspires and challenges today’s students and teachers, actors and directors. It has iconic status and enormous resonance, even as language change and the distance of time render it more and more difficult. The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s Language orients students to important contexts for understanding Shakespeare's experimentation with the English language and offers a range of approaches to enable readers and theatregoers to engage with it directly and pleasurably. Each of the fourteen chapters in the volume incorporates practical analysis and exemplary readings of passages from Shakespeare's plays, carefully modelling the approach under discussion. These up-to-date approaches aim to facilitate students – to be
both accessible and stimulating. Accordingly, not only do our contributors explain the present state of play but they identify many places of opportunity for fresh discovery. The chapters equip students to ask productive questions, to try out innovative methodological frameworks, and to test-drive newly available digital technologies. The volume is organised into four parts – basic elements, shaping contexts, new technologies, and contemporary sites for language change.

**Basic elements.** The first six chapters treat the key elements of Shakespeare’s language. They focus on style, words, speech acts, verse and metre, dialogue, and figures of speech. Jeff Dolven provides an overview of early to late Shakespeare as he explores what it means to think of literary language in terms of style, an important but not unproblematic category in use since Shakespeare’s day. What many people think of when they think about linguistic creativity is vocabulary, the storehouse of words. Alysia Kolentsis asks what exactly it is that makes Shakespeare’s words stand out? She qualifies some of the standard claims about how many words Shakespeare invented and helps students to appreciate his creativity with the existing resources of Early Modern English. Writing about speech acts in Shakespeare, David Schalkwyk invites us to consider dramatic utterance not in terms of words and stylistic ornamentation but instead as a serious – sometimes transformative – mode of action in the world. Treating verse and metre, Oliver Morgan pares down the complicated systems of scansion to some basic elements, showing readers how a minimalist prosody can yield a rich experience of Shakespeare’s verse experimentation. Turning to language as interaction, Lynne Magnusson explores how to interpret Shakespeare’s dramatic dialogue guided by the tacit knowledge of social conversation evident in our own highly skilled performances. Considering figures of speech ‘at work’ in Shakespeare, Ruth Morse takes a fresh look at metaphor and its relatives, encouraging us to see how we experience them not just as original surprises but through expectations set up by previous experience of inherited scenes.

**Shaping contexts.** The next two chapters consider early modern education and Elizabethan social organisation as shaping contexts for Shakespeare’s language. Whereas many of the volume’s chapters offer insight into the changing English language as a key resource for Shakespeare’s verbal artistry, Peter Mack takes us back to the basics of the Latin-based humanist language arts that constituted the curriculum of Elizabethan grammar schools. His chapter on rhetoric as Shakespeare’s boyhood guide to composition and as a useful approach to dramatic analysis emphasises what was actually taught in the schools rather than offering an idealised outline of classical oratory or concentrating solely on stylistic figures. (An appendix of useful
PREFACE

figures and tropes based on a handlist by Mack appears at the end of this volume.) Clearly, Shakespeare’s linguistic artistry was as deeply attuned to the social life of language in his time as it was to the classically inflected language arts of the schoolroom. Teasing out the many diverse social languages and dialects that Shakespeare’s plays bring into conversation and collision, James Siemon’s chapter gives us rich insights into the dramatist’s heterogeneous and multi-linguaged world of words.

New technologies. The next group of three chapters tests out new technologies and draws on concepts taking shape in emerging fields. Even as the passage of time and loss of historical grounding is making Shakespeare’s language more challenging to the current generation of readers and theatregoers, the availability of digital tools, enabling lightning-swift counts and searches, is making it accessible and readable in wholly new ways. Jonathan Hope’s two-part chapter on digital approaches provides, first, a how-to guide to methods one can learn quickly and use to make new discoveries now and, second, an account of more complex analytic tools and visualisation techniques that alter the object of study and that effect a conceptual shift in what it is to ‘read’. Hugh Craig’s chapter uses digital technology that was developed to answer questions about authorship attribution in order to ‘read’ large corpora of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and to study their comparative styles. Amy Cook and Seth Frey offer an interdisciplinary experiment on experiential reading when they bring new work on the cognitive processing of language into conversation with ways that innovative literary scholars have engaged with Shakespeare’s poetic artistry.

Contemporary sites for language change. The final three chapters turn to three sites – the theatre, translation, and popular culture – where Shakespeare’s highly adaptable language is still living and speaking out today. Carol Chillington Rutter considers how Shakespeare, himself an actor, wrote lines and speech exchanges to serve the actors he knew so well, and she shows how that language also serves actors today, cueing performance. Dirk Delabastita reflects on what happens to ‘Shakespeare’s language’ without the English words, translated to speak around the globe. Putting Shakespeare’s writing in interlingual and intercultural dialogue can afford a ‘stereoscopic reading’, illuminating both the host language and Shakespeare’s as its guest. In the concluding chapter, Douglas M. Lanier discovers method in how advertising and popular culture reread and adapt Shakespeare’s phrases. While Shakespeare teachers and scholars (including many in this volume) often ask that we ‘historicise’ and read the words ‘in context’, Lanier takes an appreciative look at our love for Shakespeare’s
words let loose from history and contextual constraint and fitted to our own lives and often incongruous enterprises.

Thanks are owed and most gratefully offered to the Folger Shakespeare Library for hosting a symposium that was a seed for this volume; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding support; to Lindsay Mason for expert research assistance; to graduate students in repeated incarnations of ‘Shakespeare’s Language’ at the University of Toronto; to Deirdre Baker and Carol Percy for encouragement and to Paul Stevens for generous advice; to the contributors for their patience and wisdom; and to our supportive Cambridge University Press editors, Sarah Stanton and Emily Hockley. For both editors of this volume, being in dialogue with one another about Shakespeare’s language is an enduring pleasure.

Throughout this edition, act, scene, and line references (unless otherwise indicated) are to the volumes of the New Cambridge Shakespeare.

Lynne Magnusson
ABBREVIATIONS

Ado       Much Ado about Nothing
Ant.      Antony and Cleopatra
AYLI      As You Like It
Cor.      Coriolanus
Cym.      Cymbeline
Err.      The Comedy of Errors
Ham.      Hamlet
1H4       The First Part of King Henry the Fourth
2H4       The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth
H5        King Henry the Fifth
1H6       The First Part of King Henry the Sixth
2H6       The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth
3H6       The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth
H8        King Henry the Eighth
JC        Julius Caesar
John      King John
LLL       Love’s Labour’s Lost
Lear      King Lear
Mac.      Macbeth
MM        Measure for Measure
MND       A Midsummer Night’s Dream
MV        The Merchant of Venice
Oth.      Othello
Per.      Pericles
R2        King Richard the Second
R3        King Richard the Third
Rom.      Romeo and Juliet
Shr.      The Taming of the Shrew
Temp.     The Tempest
Tim.      Timon of Athens
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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