What is the nature of romantic love and erotic desire in Shakespeare’s work? In this erudite and yet accessible study, David Schalkwyk addresses this question by exploring the historical contexts, theory and philosophy of love. Close readings of Shakespeare’s plays and poems are delivered through the lens of historical texts from Plato to Montaigne and modern writers including Jacques Lacan, Jean-Luc Marion, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou and Stanley Cavell. Through these studies, it is argued that Shakespeare has no single or overarching concept of love, and that in Shakespeare’s work, love is not an emotion. Rather, it is a form of action and disposition, to be expressed and negotiated linguistically.

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SHAKESPEARE, LOVE
AND LANGUAGE

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For Pip
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This book has been a long time in the writing. I first had the idea of writing about love in Shakespeare while working on what became *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Plays* at the turn of the century. However, overwhelmed by the enormity of the task and increasingly intrigued by the affective dimensions of service in Shakespeare’s text and society alike, I narrowed my focus in *Shakespeare, Love and Service* in 2008. But that was not the end of it. I continued to be haunted by the need to investigate love in Shakespeare that was neither bound by service nor reduced to desire or sex. Almost ten years later, *Shakespeare, Love and Language* has reluctantly pronounced that it is now or never. I might have called it “Love not service, and love not desire”, but I have discovered that love and desire cannot be kept as chastely apart as I had first thought, and the saturation of the early modern period by the discourses of service meant that the latter had to be given its due, even if it is not the focus of the present study.

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All the chapters in this book contain ideas and arguments, always reworked and rethought, that have been published elsewhere.