Foreword

Shakesplish is book about the way Shakespeare's language affects us, is "heard" by us and reverberates in contemporary English, long after face-to-face conversations with people of Shakespeare's own time have ceased to be possible. Blank teaches us how our aesthetic responses continue to have a life beyond the formally "artistic" circumstances in which Shakespeare has been presented, on-stage or as written document. By juxtaposing our aesthetic responses to those of Shakespeare's time, she shows us how our understanding of Shakespeare's strangeness is linguistic, semantic, affective, and cognitive all at once—teaching us what is at stake in attending to shifts in our aesthetic categories themselves.

Blank's focus on Shakespeare's afterlife is poignantly fitting to the way in which *Shakesplish* itself has taken shape. Sadly, Paula Blank passed away shortly before completing a final draft of this manuscript. Thanks to the care and diligence of Blank's colleagues, who gently edited and revised the pages Blank had left behind, the text you have in your hands has taken a shape fit for publication. Although necessarily incomplete, and unfortunately not further "revisable" on the basis of the excellent suggestions made by the external readers who reviewed this text for publication, I am nevertheless pleased and grateful that Blank's work can be presented to you in its current form.

Blank's work contains important reflections on some first-order questions in the humanities. She references an "understanding the foreign," not as any kind of mechanical method, but as practice-based understandings of foreignness from which various insights might be adapted. This has implications beyond Shakespeare studies. After all, part of the strangeness and power of Shakespeare's language stems from the fact that Shakespeare does not just render ordinary conversational speech, or imitate conversations "naturalistically"—rather, he catches people thinking, together and alone. Shakespeare's strangeness and power are not only a function of linguistic change, then—but also a

way of gauging how our affective/aesthetic responses (beautiful, sexy, funny) teach us something about how we understand ourselves today. If Shakespeare moves us, then the plays do so in ways that lay bare our communal bonds, too. At stake is not just the world “internal” to the play or Shakespeare’s time—but the community that stages the drama and finds itself moved by it. The way in which we are moved is—as Aristotle sensed—the arbiter of the social bonds our aesthetic responses effect.

When we listen to (or read) Shakespeare today we encounter ourselves as well as Shakespeare; or, better, the friction between the two. Like Sianne Ngai’s *Our Aesthetic Categories* and Majorie Garber’s *Loaded Words*, Blank’s work shows the stakes of our aesthetic responses to Shakespeare to be nothing less than the articulation of our own self-understanding, with the English language itself as the medium through which our collective self-conception is both articulated over time and registered in our affective responses. In light of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s recent announcement that it is commissioning new English “translations” of Shakespeare’s plays, Blank’s reflections make a timely companion to Shakespeare’s currency.

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