Shakespeare’s language is both about the language of an individual writer and about the way English was spoken in the Elizabethan period and the beginning of the Jacobean period. Both these aspects will be dealt with in the present talk.

Shakespeare lived in the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. This is the period of Early Modern English which is the transition between Middle English and the Late Modern Period which begins in the eighteenth century.

In the following slides some of the issues of the Middle and the Early Modern period are listed.
Middle English

This the Anglo-Norman period which begins after 1066 and represents the transition of Old to Middle English. French influence on Middle English is a major and the spelling practices in Middle English influence later English. The Great Vowel Shift had a major influence on the later pronunciation of English. Literature during the Middle English period consists of many religious writings along with mythological works and much private literature, often in verse form. Above all it is the period of Geoffrey Chaucer, the major author of English literature, second only to Shakespeare. There is also a body of private writing in the form of family letters which has been preserved from the Middle English period.
Early Modern Period

This period can be said to begin with the introduction of printing by William Caxton in 1476. This established the main principles of English orthography.

The Inkhorn Controversy and ‘hard words’ are key issues in the vocabulary of English as is the rise of the dictionary.

Towards the end of the Early Modern Period there is the Augustan Age (early 18th century) in which various views about ‘correct’ language arose. This is connected with the rise of grammatical prescriptivism in the 18th century and the emergence of standard pronunciation.
The Cultural History of Early Modern England
# English monarchs from the late Middle English period onwards

**House of Lancaster**
- 1399-1413 Henry IV
- 1422-1461 Henry VI
- 1413-1422 Henry V

**House of York**
- 1461-1470 Edward IV

**House of Lancaster**
- 1470-1471 Henry VI

**House of York**
- 1471-1483 Edward IV
- 1483-1485 Richard III
- 1483 Edward V

**House of Tudor**
- 1485-1509 Henry VII
- 1509-1547 Henry VIII
- 1558-1603 Elizabeth I
- 1547-1553 Edward VI
- 1553-1558 Mary I

**House of Stuart**
- 1603-1625 James I (James VI of Scotland)
- 1625-1649 Charles I
### English monarchs (continued)

#### Commonwealth and Protectorate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Monarch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1649-1653</td>
<td>Council of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1653-1658</td>
<td>Oliver Cromwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1658-1659</td>
<td>Richard Cromwell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### House of Stuart (restored)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Monarch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1660-1685</td>
<td>Charles II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1689-1694</td>
<td>William III (with Mary II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685-1688</td>
<td>James II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1694-1702</td>
<td>William III (alone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1702-1714</td>
<td>Anne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### House of Hanover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Monarch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1714-1727</td>
<td>George I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820-1830</td>
<td>George IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1727-1760</td>
<td>George II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830-1837</td>
<td>William IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760-1820</td>
<td>George III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837-1901</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## English monarchs (continued)

*House of Saxe-Coburg*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Monarch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-1910</td>
<td>Edward VII</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*House of Windsor*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Monarch</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Monarch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910-1936</td>
<td>George V</td>
<td>1936-1952</td>
<td>George VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Edward VIII</td>
<td>1952-</td>
<td>Elizabeth II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Protestant Reformation in England
Henry VIII (1509-1547), known popularly for his six wives, two of whom he had executed, introduced the Reformation into England and established the English monarch as head of the Church of England (the Anglican Church).
The dissolution of the monasteries in 1538 greatly increased Henry’s power as king.
Jervaulx Abbey, North Yorkshire, one of the largest monasteries destroyed under Henry VIII’s reign
In 1563, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, made Protestantism the official religion, i.e. it confirmed the Church of England as the state religion of the country.
Elizabeth I (1558-1603), daughter of Anne Boleyn (Henry VIII’s second wife) was a resolute defender of Protestantism as the state religion of England.
Protestantism and the ‘Four Nations’

Of the four nations of the British Isles, England became Protestant with the Anglican Church as the state religion.

Both Scotland and Wales also followed. But in these regions, so-called non-conformist varieties of Protestantism prevailed: (i) Presbyterianism in Scotland (still under the administration of the Kirk of Scotland) and (ii) Methodism (and later Quakerism) in Wales.

Ireland remained Catholic. This held for the native population and the first settlers from England, the Anglo-Normans. In the north of Ireland (Ulster) Scottish Presbyterians settled in the early 17th century, adding religious tension to the island of Ireland.
Major linguistic developments at the outset of the Early Modern Period
The major change to affect the sound system of Middle English is that which resulted in a re-alignment of the system of long vowels and diphthongs which is traditionally known as the Great Vowel Shift. Essentially long vowels are raised one level and the two high vowels are diphthongised. The shift took several centuries to complete and is still continuing in Cockney (popular London speech). The shift of short /u/ to a lower vowel as in present-day southern English but, which began in the mid 17th century, is not part of the vowel shift.
# Great Vowel Shift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1300)</th>
<th>1400</th>
<th>1500</th>
<th>1600</th>
<th>1700</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>driven</td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td>/i/</td>
<td>/ei/</td>
<td>/ɛi/</td>
<td>/ʌi/</td>
<td>/ai/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>house</td>
<td>/u:/</td>
<td>/oʊ/</td>
<td>/ou/</td>
<td>/ʌu/</td>
<td>/au/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feet</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td></td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fool</td>
<td>/o:/</td>
<td></td>
<td>/u:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beat</td>
<td>/ɛ:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>/i:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foal</td>
<td>/ɔ:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>/o:/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>/əu/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>/a:/</td>
<td></td>
<td>/æ:/</td>
<td>/ɛ:/</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>/ei/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sail</td>
<td>/ai/</td>
<td></td>
<td>/æi/</td>
<td>/ɛi/</td>
<td>/e:/</td>
<td>/ei/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>law</td>
<td>/au/</td>
<td></td>
<td>/ʌu/</td>
<td>/ʌ/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>/ɔ:/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Borrowings before and after the Great Vowel Shift

1) /ei/ versus /æ/
   *blazer* /'bleizə/ : *blasé* /blæ'zei/

2) /ai/ versus /i:/
   *divine* /dɪ'vain/ : *ravine* /ræ'vɪn/

3) /au/ versus /u:/
   *rout* /raut/ : *route* /ruːt/  
   *tower* /taʊə/ : *tour* /tuə/

4) /oi/ versus /wa/
   *choice* /tʃɔɪs/ : *memoir* /memwaɪə:/

5) /kw/ versus /k/
   *quality* /kw-/ : *bouquet* /-k-/
The chronology of recent sound changes

*Relative chronology:*
Not when A or B happened but just whether either occurred before or after X.

Example:
Shortening of /u:/ before /d/ which is older than similar shortening before /k/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>blood /blu:d/ → /blud/</th>
<th>/blʌd/</th>
<th>/tuk/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[pre-17c shift]</td>
<td>[17c shift of /u/ to /ʌ/]</td>
<td>[19c shift]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = early shift  
X = Sound change  
B = later shift
Tudor England (16th century)
The Great Fire of London, 2-5 September 1666
William Shakespeare (1564-1616), born in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, but lived most of his adult life in London (from 1585-1613).

Author of about 37 plays, 154 sonnets and two long narrative poems.

The portrait on the previous page is the so-called Chandos portrait painted between 1600 and 1610 by an unknown artist. It is assumed to depict Shakespeare, though no proof of this is available.
Shakespeare wrote plays for the group of actors known as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men of which he was a member and part-owner. After the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 it was re-formed and renamed The King’s Men (with reference to James I the successor of Elizabeth.

The plays of Shakespeare were partially published during his lifetime (from 1594 onwards in quarto editions). The First Folio edition of 1623, published by his colleagues John Heminges and Henry Condell, contains the text of 36 plays. The sonnets were published in 1609.
Shakespeare’s Globe, a reconstruction on the south bank of the River Thames in London which was opened in 1997.
Shakespeare’s plays and the English of his time
Pronunciation in plays

1) /r/ was pronounced post-vocally (*car, card*)
2) wh was pronounced [ʍ] (*which, witch*)
3) /ʊ/ was not lowered (*but, pull*)
4) /a/ before /f, s, θ/ was still short (*staff, pass, bath*)
5) /a/ after /w/ was not retracted (*swan, war*)
6) mid-vowels were not diphthongised (*play, boat*)
7) diphthongs /ai, au/ still centralised (*time [təɪm], house [həʊs]*)
8) /ɛː, eː/ had not yet been raised to /iː/ (*eat rhymes with great*)
9) fewer instances of short /uː/ (*book, cook, room*)
The performance of Shakespeare's plays
How do we know how Shakespeare’s plays were pronounced?

Fear no more the frown of the great
Thou art past the tyrant’s stroke
Care no more to clothe and eat
To thee the reed is as the oak.

The above lines a well-known piece from Act IV of Cymbeline. The lines rhyme which means that the ends of lines 1 and 3 must have the same vowel in the final word. As great is /greːt/ today the word eat must have been pronounced /eːt/. This is confirmed by the same pronunciation in conservative dialects of English, e.g. in Scotland and Ireland.

Some spellings in Shakespeare point to a pronunciation different from today, e.g. burthen, murther are the spellings used for burden and murden in modern English respectively.

The British linguist David Crystal and his son Ben Crystal have been instrumental in the use of original pronunciations for Shakespeare plays in the past decade.
How do we know how Shakespeare’s plays were pronounced?
Grammar

Multiple negation in Shakespeare

thou hast spoken no word / all this while / ... Nor understood non neither
(LLL, 1880-2)

love no man in good earnest, nor no further in sport neyther
(AYLI, 196-7)

I am not valiant neither (O, 3541)

Is’t not enough, young man, / That I did never, no nor never can
(MND, 780-1)
Older grammar in Shakespeare

*Use of old nasal plural with ‘eye’*

Come, thou monarch of the vine, Plumpy Bacchus, with pink eyne! (A&C, 1466-7)

*Use of older inflected form of ‘do’, i.e. ‘doth’*

That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears (T&C, 3116)

*Use of old genitive as possessive pronoun, i.e. ‘mine’*

But no more deep will I endart mine eye (R&J, 444)

*Use of ‘be’, and not ‘have’, as an auxiliary verb*

When we born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools (Lear, 3010)
Compounds in Shakespeare’s plays

These are very common and contribute considerably to the lexical flavour of Shakespeare’s language, both conforming to poetic usage of the time and at the same time indicating specifically his special kind of English. (note: PrP = present participle, PtP = past participle)

\[ \text{Noun} + \text{PrP} + \text{Noun} = \text{Object} + \text{Verb} + \text{Subject} \]
- heaven-kissing hill
- temple-haunting martlet
- oak-cleaving thunderbolts

\[ \text{Noun/Adj.} + \text{PrP} + \text{Noun} = \text{Complement} + \text{Verb} + \text{Subject} \]
- summer-seeming lust
- little-seeming substance

\[ \text{Noun} + \text{PrP} + \text{Noun} = \text{Prepositional Phrase} + \text{Verb} + \text{Subject} \]
- beauty-waning widow
- sky-aspiring thoughts
- summer-swelling flower
- night-tripping fairy
lazy-pacing clouds
highest-peering hill
fearful-hanging rock

Noun + PtP + Noun = Agent + Verb + Subject
star-crossed lovers
cloud-capped towers
tempest-tossed body

Adv./Adj. + PtP + Noun = Complement + Verb + Subject
high-grown field
big-swoln face
down-fallen birthdom

Noun + PtP + Noun = Prep. Phrase + Verb + Subject
fen-sucked fogs
Contemporaries of Shakespeare
Contemporary writers of Shakespeare

Christopher Marlowe  
Ben Jonson  
Edmund Spenser
Groups of authors (late 16th and 17th centuries)

*The Metaphysical poets*
This is a group of poets who are taken to have started with John Donne (1572-1631) and whose work is characterised by extravagant comparisons, reserved feelings and a display of learning. The school continued well into the 17th century, among the later representatives is Andrew Marvell (1621-78). The major poetic figure of the 17th century is John Milton (1608-74), the writer of sonnets, elegies and the epics *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671). He was also a significant pamphleteer and involved in political activities.
Groups of authors (late 16th and 17th centuries)

*Jacobean drama*
A general term for drama as produced in the reign of James I (James VI of Scotland, 1603-25). Indeed it continued into the reign of Charles I (1625-49) until the closure of the theatres in 1642. The most important dramatist of this time (apart of course from Shakespeare) is probably Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637)

*Restoration drama*
With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 under Charles II (1660-85) the theatres were re-opened and a flourishing set in, chiefly of comedy, which lasted for much of the remaining 17th century.
Religious literature of the 17th century
The King James bible of 1611
(known as the Authorized Version)

The Book of Common Prayer
(revised version of 1662)
The Earliest English Dictionary
(Robert Cawdrey, 1604)
The FIRST
ENGLISH
DICTIONARY
1604

INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN SIMPSON
OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

A Table Alphabeticall, con-
teyning and teaching the true
writing, and understanding of hard
vulgar English words, borrowed from
the Hebrew, Greeke, Latine,
or French, &c.

With the interpretation thereof by
plain English words, gathered for the benefit of
Ladies, Gentlewomen, or any other
unskilfull persons.

Whereby they may the more easilie
and better understand many hard English
words, which they shall hear or read in
Scriptures, Sermons, or elsewhere, and also
be made able to use the same aptly
themselves.

Legere, et non intelligere, neglegere est.
As good not read, as not to understand.

AT LONDON,
Printed by I. R. for Edmund Wea-
ter, & are to be sold at his shop at the great
North door of Pauls Church.
1604.
The question of a standard for English
16th and 17th century authors concerned with standard pronunciation

**John Hart** (d. 1574) in *An orthographie of English* (1569) offers a reformed spelling of English so that ‘the rude countrie Englishman’ can speak the language ‘as the best sort use to speak it’.

**George Puttenham** (d. 1590) in *The arte of English poesie* comments that ‘After a speach is fully fashioned to the common vnderstanding, & accepted by consent of a whole countrey & nation, it is called a language’. He then proceeds to mention that he regards the prime form of this language as ‘the vsuall speach of the Court and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles and not much aboue’.

About a century later, **Christopher Cooper** in his *Grammatica linguae anglicanae* (1685) stated that he regarded London speech as ‘the best dialect’, the ‘most pure and correct’, but he was quite liberal towards variation: ‘Everyone pronounceth them (words) as himself pleases’.
The Augustan age

The early to mid 18th century was a period during which satire flourished in England (and Ireland). The main authors are Joseph Addison (1672-1719), John Dryden (1631-1700), Alexander Pope (1688-1744), Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) and the Irish writer Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), the latter being particularly concerned with questions of language and entertaining generally conservative views on language change. The term *Augustan* is derived from the comparison of this age to that of the Roman Emperor Augustus under whose reign Horace, Ovid and Virgil flourished, authors who the latter-day English writers also admired.
A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue

Jonathan Swift

A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue, in a Letter to the Most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain, Printed from Benjamin Tooke, at the Middle Temple Gate, Fleetstreet, 1712

To the Most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford, &c.

My Lord,

What I had the Honour of mentioning to Your Lordship some time ago in Conversation, was not a new Thought, just then started by Accident or Occasion, but the Result of long Reflection; and I have been confirmed in my Sentiments by the Opinion of some very judicious Persons, with whom I consulted. They all agreed, That noting would be of greater Use towards the Improvement of Knowledge and Politeness, than some effectual Method for Correcting, Enlarging, and Ascertaining our Language; and they think it a Work very possible to be compassed, under the Protection of a Prince, the Countenance and Encouragement of a Ministry, and the Care of Proper Persons chosen for such an Undertaking. I was glad to find Your Lordship’s Answer in so different a Style, from what hath been commonly made use of on the like Occasions, for some Years past, that all such Thoughts must be deferred to a Time of Peace: A Topick which some have carried so far, that they would not have us, by any means, think of preserving our Civil or Religious Constitution, because we were engaged in a War abroad. It will be among the distinguishing Marks of your Ministry, My Lord, that you had the Genius above all such Regards, and that no reasonable Proposal for the Honour, the Advantage, or the Ornament of Your Country, however foreign to Your immediate Office was ever neglected by You. I confess, the Merit of this Candor and Condescension is very much lessened, because Your Lordship hardly leaves us room to offer our good Wishes, removing all our Difficulties, and supplying all our Wants, faster than the most visionary Projector can adjust his Schemes.
The rise of lexicography in the 18th century

The middle of the 18th century sees the rise of the novel (initially in epistolary form) and the publication of the first major lexicographical work, the monolingual dictionary *Dictionary of the English language* (1755) by Samuel Johnson which was a model for all future lexicographers. (Johnson drew on the dictionaries of Nathaniel Bailey - such as the *Universal etymological English dictionary* (1721), with some 40,000 entries, and the *Dictionarium Brittanicum* (1730) - for the word list he used in his own).