Shifting our focus from author to publisher and from first performance to first edition, Zachary Lesser offers a new vantage point on the drama of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, and their contemporaries. *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication* re-imagines the reception and meaning of plays by reading them through the eyes of their earliest publishers. Since success in the book trade required specialization, locating a play within its publisher's output allows us to see how the publisher read it and speculated that customers would read it. Their readings often differ radically from our own and so revise our views of the drama's engagement with early modern culture. By reading the 1633 *Jew of Malta* as a part of Nicholas Vavasour’s Laudian specialty, for example, or the 1622 *Othello* in the context of Thomas Walkley’s trade in parliamentary news, Lesser’s groundbreaking study reveals the politics of these publications – for early modern readers and for us.

ZACHARY LESSER teaches Shakespeare and early modern drama at the University of Illinois, Urbana. He has published widely on Renaissance drama and the history of the book in *ELH, English Literary Renaissance*, and *Shakespeare Quarterly*. He is the editor of Thomas Dekker’s *The Noble Spanish Soldier* (Globe Quartos).
RENAISSANCE DRAMA AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLICATION

Readings in the English Book Trade

ZACHARY LESSER
For Naomi, who threw her ticket in the wind
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Illustrations

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Like the early modern books I discuss in the ensuing pages, this book and its meanings are embedded in and shaped by a network of personal and professional relationships, which it is a real pleasure to acknowledge here. David Kastan believed in the project from the moment I first proposed it in his office. Without our numerous conversations, without his care, skill, and patience as a mentor, I would never have been able to write this book. Without the hours of procrastination spent talking to him about March Madness or where to get a good curry, I would not have enjoyed writing it so much.

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My final debts are the deepest, but fortunately, they come free of demands for repayment. My parents, David and Mary Lesser, taught me to read and...
to love books. I dedicate this book, and so much more, to Naomi Reed – my love.


**Credits for illustrations**

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Abbreviations


