It is often assumed that we can never know how the earliest audiences responded to the plays and playbooks of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and other Renaissance dramatists. We haven't been looking in all the right places. In this study, old compilations of early modern dramatic allusions provide the surprising key to a new understanding of pre-1660 reception. Whitney shows how that reception is essential for understanding English Renaissance drama. Whether or not it begins with powerful emotion, that reception creatively applies and appropriates the copious resources of drama for diverse purposes, lessons, and interests. Informed also by critical theory and historical research, this understanding reveals the significance of response to Tamburlaine and Falstaff as well as the importance of drama to Edmund Spenser, John Donne, John Milton, and many others. For the first time, it makes possible the study of particular responses of women and of workers. It also contributes to the history of subjectivity, reading, civil society, and aesthetics, and demands a new view of dramatic production.

To Elspeth and Juliana
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