This is the first full-length critical study of country house entertainment, a genre central to late Elizabethan politics. It shows how the short plays staged for the Queen at country estates like Kenilworth Castle and Elvetham shaped literary trends and intervened in political debates, including whether women made good politicians and what roles the church and local culture should play in definitions of England. In performance and print, country house entertainments facilitated political negotiations, rethought gender roles, and crafted regional and national identities. In its investigation of how the hosts used performances to negotiate local and national politics, this book also sheds light on how and why such entertainments enabled female performance and authorship at a time when English women did not write or perform commercial plays. Written in a lively and accessible style, this is fascinating reading for scholars and students of early modern literature, theater, and women's history.

ELIZABETH ZEMAN KOLKOVICH is an Assistant Professor of English at The Ohio State University. She has published essays on pageantry and Renaissance drama in Shakespeare Quarterly, English Literary Renaissance, and elsewhere. A conference paper relating to this book won the Agnes B. Strickland Award for best paper from the Queen Elizabeth I Society in 2011. Her research has been funded by short-term residential fellowships at the Huntington Library.

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For Elliot and Teddy
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1.1 Wenceslas Hollar, Kenilworth Castle plan. Reproduced by permission of The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

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4.1 Title page of Speeches Delivered to Her Maiestie This Last Progresse, 1592. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

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I began this project at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign under the expert guidance of Carol Neely. Without her early belief in its merits, tireless readings of drafts, and judicious advice, this book never would have been written. Zachary Lesser was also a wonderful mentor whose advice improved this book in countless ways, and I benefited immensely from conversations with and feedback from Catharine Gray and Lori Newcomb. At Illinois I was extremely fortunate to be surrounded by a group of brilliant new scholars. Sara Luttfring, Tara Lyons, and Alli Meyer inspired and strengthened my work, and along with Anne Brubaker and Kim O’Neill, they provided respite and support at crucial moments. The University of Illinois Graduate College funded travel to archives in early stages of my research.

I completed this book with the support of another vibrant scholarly community at Ohio State. One of the best parts of teaching at the small Mansfield campus is engaging with faculty across disciplines, and that environment enriched this book and my methods. Rachel Bowen, Terri Fisher, and Heather Tanner listened and advised when needed, and my amazing English colleagues at Mansfield — Cynthia Callahan, Susan Delagrange, Norman Jones, Barbara McGovern, and Carolyn Skinner — read drafts and shared wisdom and laughter that made my days brighter. A Mansfield Campus Seed Grant funded additional travel and writing time. For energizing exchanges and excellent fellowship, I thank Columbus colleagues Richard Dutton, Alan Farmer, Hannibal Hamlin, Jennifer Higginbotham, Chris Highley, and Luke Wilson — all of whom improved early drafts with generous, rigorous comments. I thank my research assistants Katie Pfahler, who checked many original-spelling quotations, and Chelsea Chafin, whose meticulous editing saved me from many errors. Any that remain are, of course, my own.

Parts of every chapter originated as conference papers, and I am grateful to those who responded, especially members of the Queen Elizabeth I
Acknowledgments

Society and Shakespeare Association of America. Jaime Goodrich, Gabriel Heaton, Leah Knight, Carole Levin, Erin McCarthy, Kirk Melnikoff, Tim Moylan, Niamh O’Leary, and Linda Shenk deserve special mention for their comments or willingness to share materials and expertise. Peter Greenfield, Alexandra Johnston, Sally-Beth MacLean, and other editors of the Records of Early English Drama project generously shared unpublished findings and recommended archives. I received aid from many librarians at the University of Illinois, Ohio State, the British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, Royal Collections at Windsor, several county record offices, Folger Shakespeare Library, and Huntington Library. The Huntington provided a fellowship that made Chapter 3 possible. Harmony Bench, David Cook-Martin, and Victor Quintanilla encouraged me in countless ways. I thank Sarah Stanton, Rosemary Crawley, and Sarah Starkey at Cambridge University Press for their guidance, as well as the two anonymous readers whose suggestions made this book stronger.

My scholarly network has enriched and inspired me, but my family has sustained me. The unfailing support (and child care) of my mom, Candy Zeman, made my life and work immensely better. My husband, Elliot, made sacrifices in support of my career and this project, and his optimism and confidence in my abilities have made me a better person. For me, this book is strongly tied to the birth and early years of my son, Teddy. His arrival made me newly appreciate the parents featured in this book who went to great lengths to secure their children’s futures. He and his dad have made my home a very happy one, and I dedicate this book to them with gratitude and love.

Abbreviations

BL  London, British Library
HEH  San Marino, Henry E. Huntington Library
LPL  London, Lambeth Palace Library
OED  Oxford English Dictionary
SP  London, National Archives, State Papers
Note on Transcription and Citation

I quote early modern texts in their original spelling, including i/j and u/v. I silently expand abbreviations (including ampersands) and change long s to short, and I normalize titles of printed books according to modern standards of capitalization. I have included STC numbers in citations of early modern books to help those wishing to locate a particular edition.