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0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: from text to book*

At some point during the press run of the first edition of Shakespeare's *Historie of Troylus and Cresseida* (1609), the publishers Richard Bonian and Henry Walley changed their minds about the play. Ordering their printer George Eld to stop the press, they altered the title page and inserted an anonymous preface, greeting their imagined customer with a somewhat hopeful name: "A neuer writer, to an euer reader. Newes."¹ The publishers – themselves never-writers, at least of plays if not of prefaces – famously offer "a new play" to their ever-reader, one "neuer stal'd with the Stage, neuer clapper-clawd with the palmes of the vulger," despite the fact that their own previous version of the play's title page had declared its performance "by the Kings Majesties servants at the Globe." As has often been pointed out, the preface is a "publicity blurb"² designed to appeal to those readers of plays who viewed themselves as more learned and witty than the rabble present at the theatre: this play, Bonian and Walley proclaim, was not "sullied, with the smoaky breath of the multitude." But as the publishers extend "a warning" to their potential customers to buy the play now or risk its going "out of sale," it becomes clear that they are more interested in ever-buyers, who will bestow their "testerne" (sixpence) on the publishers' latest offering, than they are in ever-readers.

Bonian and Walley lament that plays are not held in higher esteem by "grand censors" – and we may take these, as critics usually do, as figures of authority in church and state, but equally, and more to the publishers' point,

¹ All quotations from William Shakespeare, *The Famous Historie of Troylus and Cresseid* (1609), sigs. ¶¶2^{r-v}, emphasis removed. Although one cannot be certain who wrote the preface, the two publishers are the most likely agents behind this piece of advertising, for, as I will show, publishers (rather than printers) stood to profit most from sales of books. Further, the epistle is a cancel leaf, added to the book during production, when the title page was also altered; few people would have had access to the book while it was in the print shop, and the printer, George Eld, is unlikely to have made these sorts of alterations on his own.

² David Bevington, ed., *Troilus and Cressida*, by William Shakespeare (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998), 1.

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)

as all potential customers who censure plays, refusing to buy “such vanities.” The publishers wish instead that “the vaine names of commedies [were] change for the titles of Commodities.” Punning on “title” as name, noble rank, and legal right of possession, they desire (with their own interests firmly in mind) that plays, so often disparaged as worthless “vanities,” were transformed into consumer products of commercial value. But are they not themselves engaged in precisely this transformation? For it is the job of play publishers, after all, to take comedies (as well as tragedies, histories, pastorals, and any of the hybrid genres Polonius can imagine) and change them into commodities, to take their copies of plays and turn them into saleable goods.

While this preface has been frequently seen as an advertisement designed to enhance the value of the play, what has not been stressed is that the preface is also a *reading* of the play. Bonian and Walley are not merely the play’s publishers: when they reconsidered their understanding of the play and inserted their preface, they also became the earliest literary critics to publish on Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*. Not only does the preface catch the mercantile tone of the play – both repeatedly dwell on commodities and their values – but it even highlights the odd word *clapper-clawed*, used in the play itself by Thersites. Of all Shakespeare’s comedies, the preface asserts, “there is none more witty than this.” This attribution of wit, a word repeated like a shibboleth nine times in the short preface, elevates the play above the common rank, claiming its worth to customers like those Ben Jonson called his “wity young masters o’ the *Innes o’ Court*,”³ while remaining incomprehensible to “all such dull and heauy-witted worldlings, as were neuer capable of the witte of a Commedie . . .” The play’s wit deserves the book-buyer’s money “as well as the best Commedy in Terence or Plautus,” a comparison that places it firmly in the neoclassical mode that Jonson, for one, hoped to cultivate. Of course, the publishers hope to attract not merely the “learned” or “elite” or “witty” reader, but *any* potential purchaser. The point is not that their reading provides a transparent representation of their actual audience, but rather that, in order to find any audience at all, they sought to position the play within a particular niche of the print marketplace, appealing to all customers who, for whatever reasons, might want to buy a commodity marked as witty and elite. And, most importantly, they themselves understood the play (at least on second thought) as fitting within this niche.

³ Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew Fayre* (1631), sig. A4^v (Ind. 34–5).

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)*From text to book*

3

It is no accident, in other words, that *this* preface appears in *this* play, given its classical setting and its sharp, satirical style popular with the self-styled “wits” frequently imagined as the exclusive patrons of the boy companies, companies that grew out of the grammar-school tradition in which boys were taught rhetorical skill by performing the Latin drama of Terence and Plautus. Bonian and Walley carefully tailor their advertisement to suit the play they are trying to sell, and the advertisement reveals how they themselves read the play and how they hoped, and attempted to determine, that their customers would read it as well. The fact that the preface is part of a stop-press cancel sheet testifies to their ambivalence over exactly how to market it and to their belated decision to fashion it as a witty play suitable for refined tastes. This decision makes much more sense in 1609, after the vogue for satirical city comedies had been cultivated, than in 1603, when the play was first entered in the Stationers’ Register (but not printed) by James Roberts and when the boy companies had just begun to perform at Blackfriars and Paul’s. Bonian and Walley, in other words, seem ultimately to have read *Troilus* itself as a kind of city comedy, a reading far less available in 1603.⁴

With this reading, the publishers saw, as perhaps no one could have in 1603, how *Troilus* and *Cressida* could fit into their publishing strategy. During Bonian and Walley’s short two-year partnership, they were involved in three other poetic or dramatic works, all of which share the elitist emphasis on wit and classicism displayed in the preface to *Troilus*: Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Queenes* (1609), with an authorial dedication to Prince Henry noting that “*Poetry . . . is not borne with euery man*,” a claim Jonson substantiates by annotating his text with marginal references to his classical authorities, thereby indicating the “*studies, that goe vnder the title of Humanitie*,” necessary to create poetry; George Chapman’s elaborately

⁴ Roberts’s entry is typically seen by the New Bibliographers as one of the “blocking entries” used by acting companies to prevent unscrupulous printers from issuing plays that companies wanted to keep off the print market. See W. W. Greg, *Some Aspects and Problems of London Publishing Between 1550 and 1650* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 112–22. The Lord Chamberlain did on several occasions write to the Stationers’ Company preventing publication of King’s Men plays, but these isolated incidents may have been too quickly extended into the theory of regular blocking entries. See Cyndia Susan Clegg, “Liberty, License, and Authority: Press Censorship and Shakespeare,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 464–85; Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 103–5, 115–28. Roberts’s entry notes the requirement of further authority, but such a requirement was not unusual. Nor was it unusual for the rights to books to be sold informally, without an indication in the Register, which may explain why Bonian and Walley’s entrance takes no note of Roberts’s previous rights. Bevington integrates well the work of recent bibliographers and historians of the book (*Troilus*, 398–429).

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)

classical volume of poetry *Euthymiae raptus* (1609); and John Fletcher's *The Faithfull Shepheardesse* (1610), printed with preliminaries that sound very much like the preface to *Troilus and Cressida*.⁵ Fletcher complains that his play, written in the novel genre of pastoral tragicomedy, was mistaken by the "common people" for "a play of country hired Shepheards . . . sometimes laughing together, and sometimes killing one another." The "rude" multitude at the theatre, "missing whitsun ales, creame, wassel & morris-dances, began to be angry." Like Jonson, Fletcher warns his reader that his "Poeme" – the word choice is itself polemical – is not for "euery man": "If you be not reasonably assurde of your knowledge in this kinde of Poeme, lay downe the booke . . ."⁶ In deciding to publish Shakespeare's play and to alter its title page and preliminaries, Bonian and Walley thus seem to be working within a broader relationship with their customers, tailoring their product to meet commercial demands and, at the same time, shaping future demand for similar plays like Fletcher's.

Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication is about these relationships between never-writers and ever-readers, and about the texts and testerns they exchanged. It offers a new kind of historicist criticism, one that investigates the contemporary reception of early modern drama by focusing on the people who staked their money on their readings of plays. It argues that thinking of plays as publishers thought of them, as commodities, can change the ways in which we read these plays themselves. Or rather, not these plays *in themselves*, for no such thing exists, but instead particular instantiations of them, the earliest printed editions that were bought and read by the customers of early modern bookshops. What did these plays mean in these editions, in these specific historical moments, to these people?

How might we go about answering such a question, given that reading as an actual, historical activity is often intangible and undocumented? Reading can seem the most difficult to reconstruct of the everyday practices of the past, as it seems to occur in the illegible space between the text and the minds of its incalculable number of usually anonymous readers. "Scattered in an

⁵ Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queenes* (1609), sigs. A3^{r-v}. Bonian and Walley may also have been silent partners in publishing Jonson's *The Case is Altered* (1609). They entered the play on 26 January, 1609; six months later, Walley, Bonian, and Bartholomew Sutton entered the play, "whiche was Entred for H[enry] Walley and Richard Bonyon the 26 of January [1609] last." When the edition appeared, neither Walley nor Bonian appeared in the imprint. The second entry is unusual: it is a re-entry rather than a transfer to Sutton, and the wording of the entry eliminates the possibility that Bonian and Walley had forgotten their earlier entry. It seems possible that they maintained a stake in the edition though their names do not appear on the title page. *SR* III:400, 416.

⁶ John Fletcher, *The Faithfull Shepheardesse* (1610?), sig. ¶12^r.

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)*From text to book*

5

infinity of singular acts,” as Roger Chartier writes, “always of the order of the ephemeral,” reading seems obstinately to escape all attempts to constrain it through historical explanation. According to Michel de Certeau, “readers are travellers” and “nomads,” their activity a series of “ephemeral dances”; taking “no measures against the erosion of time,” reading “does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly . . .”⁷

Reading is not completely invisible and ephemeral, however: it often does generate material traces. Much recent work in the history of the book has examined marginalia, commonplace books, and other markings that readers leave behind as evidence of their labor.⁸ The “history of reading practices” that scholars like Anthony Grafton, Heidi Brayman Hackel, Lisa Jardine, Kevin Sharpe, William Sherman, and Steven Zwicker have begun to write provides important insight into the varieties of early modern literacies and “the kinds of training that readers brought to bear on their encounters with texts . . .”⁹ Studies of individual readers like John Dee, William Drake, Frances Egerton, and Gabriel Harvey have helped to restore “actual” historical readers of texts to an area of research traditionally dominated, on the one hand, by the theoretical “inscribed” or “ideal” readers of reader-response and reception theory, and, on the other hand, by the large-scale histories of the *Annales* school that claimed to deduce actual reading from statistical and sociological studies of book production and distribution.¹⁰

⁷ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 174.

⁸ Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, “Studied for Action: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78; William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Heidi Brayman, “Impressions from a ‘Scribbling Age’: Recovering the Reading Practices of Renaissance England,” diss., Columbia University, 1995; Anthony Grafton, “Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise? Guillaume Budé and His Books,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 91 (1997): 139–57; Steven Zwicker, “Reading the Margins: Politics and the Habits of Appropriation,” in *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 101–15; Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁹ Sherman, *John*, 59; William H. Sherman, “What Did Renaissance Readers Write in Their Books?” in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, eds. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 119–37, 126. For more on these “kinds of training” and the book technologies that enabled them, see *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print*, eds. Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday (New York: Routledge, 2000). For a fascinating discussion of the politics of a transformation in these “kinds of training” during and after the Civil War, see Zwicker, “Reading,” 109, 111.

¹⁰ Sherman, “What,” 120.

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)

As Sherman himself has recently lamented, however, marginalia too often tell us “less than we need to do much with them.”¹¹ At the most basic level, not all of the early modern books in which we are interested contain marginalia, and the archive of marked books has been largely determined by historical accident and by the policies of collectors and librarians who may have preserved, bleached, or cropped the margins of their books.¹² In fact, given that the process of canon creation has involved detaching “great literature” from its historical moment, these are precisely the books most likely to have been cleaned of readers’ markings in the effort to create a pristine, and hence “timeless,” copy. The playbooks in the British Library’s Ashley holdings, for instance, are unusually clean, because they derive from the collection of Thomas Wise, who, when he was not forging nineteenth-century literature, was busy stealing clean leaves from other copies of these plays and inserting them into his own to replace annotated leaves. Of course, most collectors did nothing so nefarious, but they did often favor clean copies, as we can see from their occasional notes of praise for this quality written on endpapers or flyleaves. Far more than with other books, the archive of literary books has been pre-selected against marginalia.

Even where we can find marginalia, it is difficult to relate the “history of reading practices” like annotation to specific *readings* of individual texts. The early modern practice of annotation was generally formal and impersonal, lacking what Sherman calls the “personal or creative intensity” that we might hope to find in the engagements of readers with their texts.¹³ While most of the extant copies of the plays I will discuss in this book contain either no contemporary marginalia at all or marginalia with no discernible relation to the text at hand – such as the copy of *Othello* in the Bodleian Library featuring an elaborate drawing of an ostrich on its final leaf – a sizable minority do show evidence of reading.¹⁴ But this minority clearly supports Sherman’s characterization. The most common form of annotation in these

¹¹ Ibid., 133.

¹² Monique Hulvey, “Not So Marginal: Manuscript Annotations in the Folger Incunabula,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 92 (1998): 159–76. For similar caveats, see Randall Ingram, “*Lego Ego*: Reading Seventeenth-Century Books of Epigrams,” in Andersen and Sauer, *Books*, 160–76. About one in every six copies of the plays I examined was heavily cropped, including copies in which the text had been cut from the original book and pasted into a new binding along with other plays.

¹³ Sherman, “What,” 137n41. Ingram similarly remarks that marginalia “answer dubiously and darkly to the twenty-first century scholar” (“*Lego*,” 161). But for important counter-examples, see Robert C. Evans, “Ben Jonson’s Chaucer,” *English Literary Renaissance* 19 (1989): 324–45; and A. H. Tricomi, “Philip, Earl of Pembroke, and the Analogical Way of Reading Political Tragedy,” *Journal of English and German Philology* 85 (1986): 332–45.

¹⁴ Arch.G.d.43(7), sig. N2^r. Of the 111 copies of these playbooks that I have examined, 55 are entirely free of early annotation. I examined copies of *The Insatiate Countess* (5 copies of the 1613 edition

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)*From text to book*

7

books is the simple correction of obvious printing errors: the first edition of *A King and no King*, for instance, omits a speech prefix for Tigranes at one point, and several of the extant copies show a reader adding it in the margin.¹⁵ Much of the rest of the marginalia in these playbooks consists of the underlining or marginal ticking of *sententiae*, commonplaces, or somehow noteworthy lines. Only occasionally does the reader tell us why the passage was marked, as in one copy of the 1616 edition of *The Insatiate Countesse*, in which someone has written “vndobted / freindshi[p]” beside a reconciliatory exchange between Rogero and Claridiana.¹⁶ But relating such annotations to particular readings of the text at hand is problematic, because the practice of commonplacing was designed precisely to *remove* a brief passage from its original context for later use in another. This scene from *The Insatiate Countess*, for instance, in fact expresses not undoubted friendship, but exactly the opposite, as by the end of this attempt at reconciliation, Rogero and Claridiana once again fall to quarreling, with each suspecting the other of cuckolding him. This annotator’s response obviously provides interesting evidence of one act of reading *The Insatiate Countess*, but this act of reading the play is less clearly a reading of the play.

Most importantly, as Sherman points out, even in those rare instances when we can see evidence of the interpretation of particular texts, there are still formidable obstacles to connecting the idiosyncratic responses of individuals to the “larger patterns that most literary and historical scholars have as their goal.”¹⁷ It is surely important, for example, that a reader of Thomas Archer’s 1612 edition of *The White Diuel* copied and translated one of Martial’s epigrams on adultery beside the scene in which Flamineo disingenuously advises the jealous Camillo not to guard Vittoria too closely because “women are more willinglie & more gloriouslie chast, when they are least restrayned of their libertie” (sig. B3^r; 1.2.90–2). The transcribed epigram makes the same point, indeed may be the source of Webster’s dialogue: “Nullus in vrbe fuit tota / qui tangere vellet / vxore[m] gratis Caeciliane tua[m] / Du[m] licuit / sed nunc positis custodibus Ingens /

and 4 of the 1616 edition), *The Jew of Malta* (16 copies), *A King and no King* (8 copies of 1619 and 10 of 1625), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (8 copies), *The Noble Spanish Soldier* (16 copies), *Othello* (12 copies), *Phylaster* (6 copies of 1620 and 6 of 1622), *The Roaring Girl* (8 copies), and *The White Devil* (12 copies). I examined all copies of these plays at the following libraries: Beinecke (10 books total), Bodleian (18), Boston Public (7), British (19), Folger (15), Huntington (14), London Guildhall (2), Houghton (7), New York Public (1), Pierpont Morgan (2), St John’s College, Oxford (1), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1), Victoria and Albert National Art (13), Worcester College, Oxford (1).

¹⁵ See sig. A4^v of British Library 643.h.8; Bodleian Mal.242(8); Victoria and Albert D.25.A.18; Folger STC 1670.

¹⁶ Folger STC 17477, sig. B3^r. ¹⁷ Sherman, “What,” 131.

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Turba fututoru[m] est, / Ingeniosus homo es / Martialli. epigra[m.]. lib. I. ep. [73],” which the reader freely translates: “[. . .] who when hee might) thy wife would neuer [*sc.* touch.] But now / Thy gate being shutt, the wenchers flock to it / Best way to gett a horne. I prayse thy witt.”¹⁸ Here we have evidence for one reader’s understanding of this scene in relation to the classical tradition, an association that Webster would have welcomed, given that he himself quotes from Martial to conclude his preface to the reader. But, as I will discuss in chapter four, the publisher Thomas Archer had his own reasons for publishing the play, reasons that had little to do with classicism. How many of Archer’s other customers shared this reader’s intertextual associations? How representative of Archer’s audience is this one customer? These are questions that marginalia studies, by their very nature, cannot answer, but they are also questions of real importance, for they point towards the “larger patterns” that most interest most of us.

If we want to understand the *politics* of these plays, in other words, we need a larger sense of their reception than studies of individual readers can provide, because politics by definition relate to cultural and social structures beyond the level of the individual. As individual and “actual” readers, however, publishers differ significantly from their customers. Publishers must read not only for themselves, but for others. A publisher’s job is not just to read texts but to predict how others will read them. For this reason, although attention to the moments of *consumption* embodied in readers’ markings will continue to play a vital role in any history of reading, we also need to look at moments of *production*, at the men and women whose careers depended on their readings of texts and their assessments of the likely readings of their customers. The history of publishing is itself a history of reading, and every play publication is already a piece of literary criticism – if only we can learn to read it.

We must begin with one crucial fact about the early modern book trade. As I have suggested with Bonian and Walley, and as I will detail in chapter one, publishers tended to specialize in order to appeal to their customers. For this reason, if we read a play in the context of its publisher’s entire corpus of work, we can often begin to see what the publisher saw in the play – even in the absence of paratextual matter like Bonian and Walley’s preface – since determining whether a given play fits within a given specialty requires the publisher’s interpretation. And because the publisher always has one eye on his potential customers, we can discern, through the publisher’s informed

¹⁸ British Library 840.c.37.

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)*From text to book*

9

judgment, how the people who bought the play may have read it – or, at least, how the publisher imagined they would read it.¹⁹

Though Bonian and Walley seem to have been familiar with the details of the text of *Troilus and Cressida* – though they seem, that is, actually to have read the play – I am not suggesting, nor does my argument require, that all publishers were so meticulous in reading their texts before deciding whether to publish them. I use “reading” broadly to indicate the wide variety of ways in which publishers must have made sense of texts, for whether or not they read a play in its entirety or saw it performed in the theatre, all early modern publishers needed to judge plays’ larger cultural meanings in order to decide whether they fit into their specialties. Reading, in this sense, begins well before the publisher leafs through a manuscript or enters the playhouse yard. Reading includes, among other possibilities, the publisher’s understanding of a text based on its title, or its author’s previous work, or its provenance – its acting company, theatre, patrons, or coterie – or its generic conventions, or simply based on what friends or fellow stationers may have said about the text. All these judgments, many of which may be only partly conscious, are part of the publisher’s reading of the text, for they form its “horizon of expectations,” and while these expectations may or may not be fulfilled if the publisher reads the text word by word, they will inevitably shape that reading.²⁰ Even if, as must sometimes have been the case, the publisher never does read the entire text, these judgments in themselves function as an interpretation or reading of the text and its place in early modern culture, and one of considerable importance, for it is this reading that stands behind the decision to publish.

More than a century ago, Edward Arber alerted scholars to the importance of publishers, beginning his *Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London* with a bibliographical call to arms: “The time has

¹⁹ Print was only one part of the circulation of texts and of the book trade. Early modern publishers would certainly have taken account of manuscript circulation when making their business decisions, as the two markets must have overlapped. But I focus here on printed books, not merely because it is difficult to match scribal publications to particular entrepreneurial stationers, but also because, as T. H. Howard-Hill has recently shown, “nothing in the literature of dramatic publication indicates that there was a nonauthorial commercial trade in dramatic manuscripts . . . [With plays,] there was no serious commercial competition between the manuscript tradition and the newer print technology in the English Renaissance.” “Nor Stage, Nor Stationers Stall Can Showe”: The Circulation of Plays in Manuscript in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *Book History* 2 (1999): 28–41, 37, 39. On scribal publication, see Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

²⁰ Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 11–41.

Cambridge University Press

0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

Excerpt

[More information](#)

now come when the English Printer and the English Publisher must take their due places in the national estimation. Hitherto the Author has had it all his own way.”²¹ Arber’s distinction between the English printer and the English publisher – and we might add the English bookseller – is of vital importance, and I will be defining each of these roles more precisely in my first chapter. What interests me here, however, is that while the printers of plays have since received voluminous attention, the other agents Arber urged us to consider have failed to rouse critics, particularly literary critics, to battle, and Arber’s injunction (without, perhaps, its emphasis on “national estimation”) is as relevant today as in 1875.

This lack of critical attention to publishers is odd, considering that, as Peter Blayney points out, “if our concern is . . . the reasons why *that* play was published *then* . . . we must focus . . . on the publisher.”²² Understanding why a play seemed particularly vendible at a given time could provide a wealth of possibilities for the historicist critic. But publishers, when they are studied at all, still seem solely the concern of the book historian, separated by a disciplinary gulf from literary critics, largely because it has not been clear how publishers might *matter* for our readings of texts. One can see the depth of this problem when even Robert Darnton, one of the most prominent historians of the book, writes: “I cannot claim that the works of Voltaire and Rousseau take on a new meaning if one knows who sold them.”²³ While I cannot speak to the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, I do claim that the plays of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Beaumont and Fletcher, and their contemporaries will in fact take on new meanings if we pay attention to the people who published them. Indeed, that is the central claim of this book.

But in order to see these meanings we need to stop thinking of plays simply as *texts*, and start thinking of them as *books*. As D. F. McKenzie has shown us, “every book tells a story quite apart from that recounted by its text.”²⁴ Thinking of a play as a *text* means attending to the meanings of an immaterial sequence of letters, words, and punctuation, and for this reason most literary critics feel comfortable turning to modern editions for their texts; if a text is immaterial, it may be removed from its original

²¹ SR I:xiii.

²² Peter Blayney, “The Publication of Playbooks,” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 383–422, 391.

²³ Robert Darnton, “The Forgotten Middlemen of Literature,” in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990), 136–53, 152.

²⁴ D. F. McKenzie, “‘What’s Past Is Prologue’: The Bibliographical Society and History of the Book,” in *Making Meaning: “Printers of the Mind” and Other Essays*, eds. Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, S.J. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 259–75, 262.