Preface

The Production of English Renaissance Culture responds to the challenge of resituating literary studies within cultural criticism. It is concerned with how the cultural treasures and values of Renaissance England are entangled with the economic and political dynamics of accumulation, production, and exchange. Focusing on the complex relations between symbolic and material economies, its nine essays locate cultural artifacts within a diverse set of social, political, and economic practices, including, among others, the development of the print trade, the reception of relics and portraits, the agrarian economics of the Diggers, the history of French and English witchcraft trials, and legal articulations of the crime of buggery. In using cultural history and criticism as contexts for literary study, the essays attend to the literary implications of social struggle and to the political and ideological dimensions of a culture that works in specific institutional settings to shape knowledge for peoples' consumption. Our contributors seek to assess the social and political functions of literary texts without reducing them to these functions.

With one exception the essays gathered here were first presented in October 1990 at the Seventeenth Alabama Symposium in English and American Literature. This program bore the title *wisemens treasure*, a reference to the last two words of the 1596 *Faerie Queene*. Echoes of this phrase in several of the essays have been allowed to stand, reminders that the metaphor of "cultural treasures" is central to our topic and that, despite the variety of their approaches and specific interests, these essays developed out of a conversation among the organizers-editors and participants-contributors, a conversation conducted over several years through an increasingly complex communications technology. *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* is truly a collaborative endeavor.

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DAVID LEE MILLER
SHARON O'DAIR
HAROLD WEBER

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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