

## **A rare early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet***

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. London: John Smethwicke, 1637. 6 13/16 inches x 5 inches (172 mm x 127 mm), [102] pages, A–N4.

THE | TRAGEDY | OF HAMLET | Prince of | Denmark. | Newly imprinted  
and enlarged, according to the true | and perfect Copy last Printed. | By  
**William Shakespeare**. | [Smethwicke's device] | *London*, | Printed by *R.*  
*Young* for *Iohn Smethwicke*, and are to be sold at his | shop in *Saint Dunstons*  
Church-yard in *Fleet-stteet*, | under the Diall. 1637.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

One of Shakespeare's most esteemed plays, *Hamlet* is the story of the troubled prince of Denmark and the events that unfold when he becomes aware that his father was killed by his uncle, now his stepfather. It is a tragedy of regicide and revenge with all the trimmings: a usurper on the throne, a haunting, madness, suicide, and mayhem resulting in multiple deaths — both accidental and homicidal, not to mention a foreign invasion. Hamlet's famous soliloquy in Act III of the play as we know it (the quartos are not divided into acts) is, beyond a doubt, one of the most powerful speeches in all of Shakespeare's plays.

This fifth quarto of *Hamlet* is bound in nineteenth-century dark red levant morocco with gold tooling. A stamp on the verso of the front free endpaper ("BOUND BY F. BEDFORD") identifies this as the work of the noted nineteenth-century London binder Francis Bedford (1799–1883). The spine is divided into six compartments with raised bands with "SHAKE | SPEARE | HAMLET in gold in the second spine compartment and "LOND. | 1637" in the third. The edges of the boards and the turn-ins are gold tooled, the endpapers marbled, and the edges gilt. A handwritten note by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps regarding the facsimile title page is written on the obverse of the front free endpaper; copy correction notes by J.O.H. on obverse of back free endpaper.

This quarto was given to Edinburgh University Library in 1872 by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps (1820–1889), the English Shakespeare collector and scholar whose *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (1848) was published in several editions. Beginning in the 1870s, he devoted his time completely to the research of Shakespeare's life. Halliwell-Phillipps was instrumental in

the acquisition of New Place, the site of Shakespeare's last home, and in the creation of the Museum at Stratford-upon-Avon (now Nash's House and New Place).

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