

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. London: John Smethwicke, 1637. 7 1/8 inches x 5 1/16 inches (181 mm x 129 mm), [88] pages, A–L4.

THE MOST | EXCELLENT | And Lamentable Tragedie, | of ROMEO and | JULIET. | As it hath been sundry times publikely Acted | by the KINGS Majesties Servants | at the GLOBE. | Written by *W. Shake-speare*. | *Newly corrected, augmented, and amended*. | [Smethwicke's device] | LONDON, | Printed by R. Young for *John Smethwicke*, and are to be sold at | his Shop in St. *Dunstans* Church-yard in Fleetstreet, | under the Dyall. 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.

In this play, Romeo and Juliet, offspring of the feuding Montagues and Capulets in Verona, fall in love at a masquerade ball and later discover that the other belongs to a rival family. They pursue their love nonetheless and arrange to be secretly married by a sympathetic friar. Romeo is drawn into a fight and kills Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, just before he arrives at her house to consummate their marriage; meanwhile Juliet's father betroths Juliet to Paris and sets their

marriage to take place three days later. Juliet goes to the friar for help and he suggests she take a potion the night before her wedding, which will make her appear dead so she and Romeo can reunite in Mantua. Romeo never receives the message from the friar but hears of Juliet's death and goes to her tomb with poison to kill himself. He arrives and sees Juliet's body, takes the poison and, as he dies, Juliet awakens to discover her lover dead. Juliet stabs herself just as Capulet and Montague arrive at the tomb; they agree to end their feud.

This fifth quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, now at the National Library of Scotland, is inlaid and bound in nineteenth-century half-leather with dark green straight-grained morocco spine and tips edged with gold rules, dark tan boards. Lettered in gold: "ROMEO | & | JULIET" in the second compartment; 5TH | EDIT. | in the third, "WM. | SHAKESPEARE" in the fourth and "1637" at the spine foot. Note in hand of George Steevens underneath the inlaid title page: "Fifth Edition. Perfect. Notes by George Steevens, Esq." The bookplate of John Patrick Crichton Stuart, the third Marquis of Bute is on the front pastedown; the bookplate for the Bute Collection of English Plays is on the back pastedown.

This quarto was previously owned by George Steevens (1736–1800). He was an English Shakespeare editor who collaborated with Samuel Johnson in issuing a complete edition of Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators* (10 vols., 1773). Steevens owned roughly fifty quartos, and his sale (13 May 1800) was the first large Shakespeare collection to appear at auction. English book collector Richard Forster acquired this quarto from the Steevens' auction, and John Stuart, the first Marquis of Bute (1744–1814) purchased it from Forster's 1806 sale. Stuart added it to the Bute Collection of early English plays that was initially formed by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and expanded by her son-in-law John Stuart, third Earl of Bute. Lady Mary's grandson, the first Marquis of Bute, notably acquired 39 Shakespeare quartos. The collection contains 1,266 English plays and includes seventeenth- and eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and examples of the foremost dramatists from Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, and Restoration periods; also included are a number of promptbooks. The Bute Collection is now in the National Library of Scotland, which purchased it from Major Michael Crichton Stuart on April 3, 1956.

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