

A rare early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. London: Cuthbert Burby, 1599. 7 1/16 inches x 4 13/16 inches (179 mm x 123 mm), [92] pages, A–L4 M2.

The | most ex= | cellent and lamentable | Tragedie, of Romeo | and *Iuliet*. | *Newly corrected, augmented, and | amended*: As it hath bene sundry times publicly acted, by the | right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine | his Seruants. | [Creede's device] | London | Printed by Thomas Creede, for Cuthbert Burby, and are to | be sold at his shop neare the Exchange. | 1599.

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 second quarto edition of *Romeo and Juliet* is bound in green morocco with gold rules bordering the front and back covers with the arms of Edinburgh University in gold on front and back covers; the book plate of Edinburgh University is on front pastedown. In gold reading up the spine: "SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO AND JULIET LOND. 1599."

This quarto was given to the University of Edinburgh in 1627 by James Drummond (1585–1649) of Hawthornden, a former student at the university, as well as a poet and man of letters.

Octavo code: **sharoz**