

A rare early quarto of Shakespeare's *King Lear*

William Shakespeare, *King Lear*. London: Nathaniel Butter, [1619]. 6 11/16 inches x 5 inches (178 mm x 127 mm), [88] pages, A–L4 (F4 in facsimile).

M. VWilliam Shake-speare, | *his* | True Chronicle History of the life | and death of King *Lear*, and his | *three Daughters*. | *With the vnfortunate life of Edgar*, | sonne and heire to the Earle of *Glocester*, and | *his sullen and assumed humour of Tom* | of Bedlam. | *As it was plaid before the Kings Maiesty at White-Hall, vp-* | *pon S. Stephens night, in Christmas Hollidaies*. | By his Maiesties Seruants, playing vsually at the | *Globe on the Banck-side*. | [Heb Ddieu device] | Printed for *Nathaniel Butter*. | 1608.

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.

At the opening of *King Lear*, the title character, ruler of England, announces he will divide his kingdom among his three daughters according to their love for him. Goneril and Regan make elaborate declarations of love for him, while Cordelia says simply that she loves him as a daughter ought. Despite the protests of his closest advisor, the Earl of Kent, Lear disowns Cordelia and splits his domain between Regan and Goneril. He then banishes Kent and goes to live with Goneril. The king of France marries Cordelia despite her lack of dowry and title. Lear soon quarrels with Goneril over his entourage, which includes the banished yet loyal Kent in disguise, and leaves to live with Regan. Lear and Regan also argue, and she reduces the number of his retainers. Goneril arrives and the sisters dismiss Lear's courtiers altogether. Lear, driven to madness by their ill-treatment, wanders about in a tempest and is led to shelter by the Earl of Gloucester, who is blinded by Regan and her husband because of his "treachery." Gloucester's faithful son Edgar prevents his suicide, while his illegitimate son Edmund becomes Goneril's lover. Cordelia leads an army to rescue Lear from her sisters and is reconciled with him; Lear regains his sanity. Cordelia's forces are defeated by those of her sisters, and she and Lear are imprisoned. Regan has also become Edmund's lover, so she and Goneril fight and kill each other. Edgar mortally wounds Edmund, who has ordered Cordelia to be hanged. Lear dies of grief.

This second quarto of *King Lear* is bound in nineteenth-century maroon morocco with gold tooling. A stamp in the bottom center of the front cover turn-in ("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 | KING | LEAR” in gold in the second spine compartment, and “LONDON | 1608” in the third. (The 1608 date on the title page and spine is erroneous; this quarto was printed by William Jaggard in 1619 from the 1608 first quarto.) The edges of the boards and the turn-ins are gold tooled, the endpapers marbled, and the edges gilt. A note by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps stating that the text is slightly made up by facsimile is handwritten on the obverse of the front 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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