

## **The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost***

William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*. London: Cuthbert Burby, 1598.  
6 13/16 inches x 4 7/8 inches (173 mm x 121 mm), [76] pages, A–I4 K2.

A | pleasant | Conceited Comedie | **called**, | Loues labors lost. | As it vvas  
presented before her Highnes | this last Christmas. | Newly corrected and  
augmented | *By W. Shakespere.* | [ornament] | Imprinted at London by W. W.  
| for *Cutbert Burby.* | 1598.

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 the play, Ferdinand, the king of Navarre, and three noble

friends take an oath to devote themselves to scholarship and avoid women for a period of three years. He decrees that no woman will come near his court. Soon after the princess of France arrives, along with three ladies from her retinue, to discuss whether France owes money to the kingdom of Navarre. The French delegation is granted an audience with Ferdinand, who immediately becomes smitten with the princess. Each of his attendants, as well, have been captivated by different ladies accompanying the princess. One by one, the men let slip their love for the women; they agree to break their vow and pursue their respective love interests. The men visit the princess and her attendants in disguise but are recognized by the women who tease them. The men return out of costume and declare their love. After a lavish pageant, word arrives at the court that the king of France is dead; the princess declares she will not consider Ferdinand's suit before a year of mourning has elapsed. Her attendants do likewise with their suitors and they return to France.

This first quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* is bound in green morocco with the arms of Edinburgh University in gold on front and back covers, book plate of Edinburgh University on front pastedown. In gold reading up the spine: SHAKESPEARE'S LOVES LABOUR'S LOST LOND. 1598.

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

Octavo code: **shaloz**