

The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Othello*

William Shakespeare, *Othello*. London: Thomas Walkley, 1622. 7 inches x 4 3/4 inches (178 mm x 121 mm); [4], 80, 89–99, [1] pages; A2 B–M4 N2 (Title, A2, B1–D4, I2, I3, K1–N2 in facsimile).

The | Tragœdy of Othello, | The Moore of Venice. | *As it hath beene diuerse times acted at the | Globe, and at the Black-Friers, by | his Maiesties seruants. | Written by VWilliam Shakespeare. | [Okes' device] | London, | Printed by N. O. for Thomas Walkley, and are to be sold at his | shop, at the Eagle and Child, in Brittans Bursse. | 1622.*

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, Othello the Moor returns to Venice from a victorious battle campaign to his faithful, loving wife Desdemona, daughter of a Venetian senator. Iago, Othello's ensign, plots to take power and humiliate Othello. He first entraps Cassio, Othello's trusted captain, into creating a commotion outside Othello's window, waking Othello and ultimately resulting in replacing Cassio with Iago as captain. Iago slowly undermines Othello's confidence by making him believe that his beloved Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio. As Othello becomes more distant from Desdemona, he ignores her pleas to explain his behavior while Iago's whisperings make him increasingly more jealous and vengeful. Othello begins to believe that to retain his honor he must kill Desdemona. He strangles her and as she lays dying, he is told that Iago has been deceiving him; Othello kills himself and Iago flees.

This first quarto of *Othello* is bound in dark blue levant morocco over marbled boards. A stamp on the reverse 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'S | OTHELLO" lettered in gold in the second compartment; "LONDON | 1622" in the third. Handwritten notes by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps stating "18 leaves ins this volume are original. All the rest are in FS but 18 leaves of so very rare an edition should not be dispised" on the recto of the first blank leaf; "C. and P. 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).

Octavo code: **shaotm**