

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Othello*

William Shakespeare, *Othello*. London: Richard Hawkins, 1630. 6 7/8 inches x 5 1/16 inches (175 mm x 129 mm), [2], 78, 77–81, 83–92, [1] pages; A–M4 [title page is mounted, leaves A4 and C4 are supplied by another copy and are tipped in].

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 VVilliam Shakespeare.* |
[White's device] | *LONDON,* | Printed by *A. M.* for *Richard Hawkins,* and are to be sold at | his
shoppe in Chancery-Lane, neere Sergeants-Inne. | 1630.

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 second quarto of *Othello* is bound in nineteenth-century russia with gold-stamped ornamental borders around the edges of both covers; the same border is on the narrow turn-ins, marbled endpapers. Lettered in gold up the spine: "OTHELLO MOORE OF VENICE 1630". 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 second quarto of *Othello* was probably owned by George Steevens (1736–1800). Steevens 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). He owned roughly fifty quartos, and his sale (13 May 1800) was the first large Shakespeare collection to appear at auction. The quarto was purchased by the English book collector Richard Forster and then in 1806 by John Stuart, the first Marquis of Bute (1744–1814). 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. 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 3 April 1956.

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