

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

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. London: John Smethwicke, 1609. 6 15/16 inches x 5 inches (176 mm x 127 mm), [92] pages, A–L4 M2.

The | most ex- | cellent and | Lamentable Tragedie, of | *Romeo and Juliet*. |
As it hath beene sundrie times publicquely Acted, | by the Kings Maiesties
Seruants | at the Globe. | Newly corrected, augmented, and amended : |
[ornament] | **London** | Printed for **Iohn Smethvvick**, and are to besold | at
his Shop in Saint *Dunstanes* Church-yard, | in Fleetestreete vnder the Dyall. |
1609.

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 third quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* was bound in eighteenth-century semi-limp vellum with gold tooling. The spine is divided into five decorative compartments, and the leaves' edges are gilt. Three notes by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, on the subject of this volume's acquisition and rarity as well as quarto valuation, are pasted on the front pastedown and are written on the front flyleaf.

This quarto, before its acquisition by the British Museum in 1858, was owned 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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