

The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*. London: R. Bonian and H. Walley, 1609. 6 7/8 inches x 4 13/16 inches (175 mm x 122 mm), [92] pages, A–L4 (-M2, blank).

The | Historie of Troylus | and Cresseida. | *As it was acted by the Kings
Maiesties* | seruants at the Globe. | *Written by William Shakespeare.* |
[ornament] | London | Imprinted by *G. Eld* for *R. Bonian* and *H. Walley*, and
| are to be sold at the spred Eagle in Paules | Church-yard, ouer against the |
great North doore. 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.

This tragic-comedic play is set in the seventh year of the Trojan War. Troilus, one of the sons of the king of Troy, and Cressida, daughter of Calchus, fall in love. Much of the play is concerned with infighting among the invading Greeks, who attempt to provoke Achilles to fight against the Trojans. Calchus flees to the Greeks and, in exchange for information, asks that Cressida be brought to Greece, where she is pursued by Diomedes. Troilus discovers Cressida's betrayal and vows to kill Diomedes in battle but fails. Achilles finally decides to fight when his companion Patroclus is killed by Hector. Achilles has his men kill Hector as he resting and unarmed, and Troy is laid waste.

This quarto (Quarto A) of *Troilus and Cressida* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red half sheep, with gold tooling and stone-marbled paper boards. "TROYLUS AND CRESSEIDA 1609" is lettered in gold up the spine. The leaves' edges are red. "George Steevens" is written on the title page.

Now at the British Library, this quarto was formerly in the collection of George Steevens (1736–1800), 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 book was then acquired by John Ker, 3rd Duke of Roxburghe (1740–1804), Scottish noble and bibliophile. Ker was a personal friend of George III, who bestowed numerous honors and offices

upon him. His superb collection focused on Shakespeareana and included Caxtons as well as a legendary first edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron*; the collection was sold at auction in 1812, an event that prompted the founding of the Roxburghe Club for rare books. This quarto was then added to the library of George III (1738–1820), who reigned as king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 until his death. At the start of George III's reign, there was no royal library to speak of; his grandfather, George II, had presented his library to the British Museum in 1757. In 1763, George III began his collection in earnest with the acquisition of the library of Joseph Smith, the former British consul in Venice whose collection contained many early printed books and classics. The king's agents attended many English and Continental auctions, and they purchased both single volumes and complete libraries on his behalf, steadily enlarging the royal collection. In 1774 Frederick Augusta Barnard was appointed Royal Librarian, a post he held for the remainder of George III's reign. Barnard, with the advice of such men of letters as Samuel Johnson, enlarged the king's library in a methodical fashion, assembling a fine collection of religious texts, English and European history, classics, English and Italian literature, and such incunables as a Gutenberg Bible and a first edition of Caxton's *Canterbury Tales*. By 1820, the library included 65,000 printed books and nearly 20,000 pamphlets; George IV, who succeeded his father on the throne, donated the library to the British Museum in 1823.

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