

## **The first quarto edition of Fletcher's and Shakespeare's *Two Noble Kinsmen***

John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, *Two Noble Kinsmen*. London: John Waterson, 1634. 4o; [2], 88, [2] pages; π1 B–M4 N2 (-N2).

[The] | two | noble | kinsmen: | Presented at the Blackfriars | by the Kings  
Maiesties servants, | with great applause: | Written by the memorable  
Worthies | of their time; | {Mr. *John Fletcher*, and | Mr. *William*  
*Shakspeare*.} Gent. | [Heb Ddieu device] | Printed at *London* by *Tho. Cotes*,  
for *John Waterson*: | and are to be sold at the signe of the *Crowne* | in *Pauls*  
Church-yard. 1634.

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.

A collaborative effort of Shakespeare and John Fletcher (who succeeded Shakespeare as playwright for the King's Men), *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is based on Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. Set in ancient Greece, the story is of the cousins Palamon and Arcite who, after being captured by Theseus and the Athenians, both fall in love with Princess Emilia, sister of Hippolyta, Theseus' wife. While they are imprisoned, the jailor's daughter falls hopelessly in love with Palamon and engineers his escape after Arcite is banished. Both cousins eventually return to Athens and are about to duel for the hand of Emilia when Arcite dies after being thrown from his horse; with his dying breath, he gives Emilia to Palamon.

This first quarto of was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century brown half morocco, with gold-tooling comb-marbled paper boards. "FLETCHER AND SHAKSPEARE. TWO NOBLE KINSMEN. LOND. 1634." is lettered in gold up the spine, below the crest of David Garrick.

Now at the British Library, this quarto was previously owned by David Garrick (1717–1779), an English actor whose unaffected performance in the title role of *Richard III* in 1741 brought him renown. Garrick, both as an actor and theatrical manager, exerted a tremendous influence on stage practices throughout the 18th century; as a friend and classics pupil of Samuel Johnson, he brought reputability to his trade. He began to collect early printed plays during the 1740s, at which time most collectors regarded stage scripts as popular works unfit for inclusion in serious libraries. Garrick, however, recognized their worth and, assisted by friends and knowledgeable

advisors, built his collection in the interest of scholarship and the enrichment of subsequent generations. He bequeathed the collection to the British Museum upon his death in 1779.

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