

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; | {M<sup>r</sup>. *John  
Fletcher*, and | M<sup>r</sup>. *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 *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, now in the Bodleian Library, was bound, along with other items, in old brown calf with blind-tooled borders. The spine divided into five compartments by raised bands. The quarto bears no marks of previous owners.

Octavo code: **shatwr**