

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; | {M^r. *John Fletcher*, and | M^r. *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 quarto is bound, along with several plays by John Fletcher (1579–1625) and Francis Beaumont (1584–1616), rebacked and blind-tooled tan calf. The spine is divided into six compartments by raised bands. “OLD | PLAYS” is lettered in gold on a red label in the second compartment, and “VOL. | 60.” appears in the third compartment. A piece of paper inlaid in the front pastedown bears a large signature “Charles R” with the following notation by Edmund Malone “ Oct. 8. 1642. | The above is the Signature of Charles the First. | Edmund Malone. | Dec. 1. 1794.” Pasted onto the first front flyleaf is a piece of paper listing the plays in the volume: “The Maides Tragedie | A King & no King ____ Comedie | Philaster or Loves Lyes bleeding ____ Comedie | The Scornefull Lady ____ Comedie | The elder Brother ____ Comedie | Rollo Duke of Normandy ____ Tragedie | Cupides Revenge ____ Tragedie | The Knights of the burning Pestle ____ Comedie | The two noble Kinsmen ____ History | All, by Beaumont & Fletcher”. Below is a notation by Malone: “This Volume belonged to King Charles I. and | the above is his hand-writing. I have compared it | with the Copy of Shakespeare’s plays, which he | gave to Sir Thomas Herbert (now in the posses- | sion of Mr. Steevens) which likewise contains some of his Majesty’s handwriting. | E. Malone, June 1. 177[?]” Another note, presumably by Malone follows: The volume when it came into my hands | was in an old [?] [?binding].

This quarto was donated to the Bodleian Library in 1821. It was previously owned by Edmund Malone who bequeathed it, among many other important books, to his older brother Richard, Lord Sunderlin. Edmund Malone (1741–1812), after whom the Malone Society was named in 1909, was a renowned Shakespeare scholar who began his literary work in London in 1777. He was a friend to both Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, and he assisted Boswell in revising his biography of Johnson. Malone, the only collector of Shakespeare quartos to acquire a complete set, published an 11-volume edition of Shakespeare’s works in 1790 and unmasked the Shakespeare manuscript forgeries of William Henry Ireland. Malone left his uncompleted work on Shakespeare to James Boswell the younger, who had it published in a 21-volume octavo edition in 1821 (Third Variorum Edition). Although not particularly successful as a textual editor

of Shakespeare, Malone is especially noted for his work on Elizabethan theater. Malone traces the provenance of the book to Charles I (1600–1649), who reigned as King of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1625 until his death. During the last several years of his reign, Charles was embroiled in conflict with parliamentarians who demanded constitutional monarchy and Puritans who rebelled against the king's policies regarding religion. Refusing to yield to the demands of those who bested him in the civil war, Charles was tried for treason and executed 30 January 1649.

Octavo code: **shatwu**