

The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Pericles*

William Shakespeare, *Pericles*. London: Henry Gosson, 1609. 4o, [72] pages, A–I4 (-I4 blank).

The late, | And much admired Play, | Called | Pericles, Prince | of Tyre. |
With the true Relation of the whole Historie, | aduentures, and fortunes of the
said Prince : | As also, | The no lesse strange, and worthy accidents, | in the
Birth and Life, of his Daughter | *Mariana*. | As it hath been diuers and sundry
times acted by | his Maiesties Seruants, at the Globe on | the Banck-side. | By
William [ornaments] Shakespeare. | [ornament] | Imprinted at London for
Henry Gosson, and are | to be sold at the signe of the Sunne in | Pater-noster
row, &c. | 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.

Narrated by Gower, the play tells the complicated story of Pericles, eventual king of Tyre. The story opens with Antiochus who is offering his daughter's hand to any suitor who can answer a riddle—failure means death. Pericles gives the correct answer, which exposes Antiochus as having an incestuous affair with his daughter. Pericles flees to Tarsus and saves the nation from famine by bringing stores of corn. He is called back to Tyre but is shipwrecked on Pentapolis, where he wins in a jousting tournament and the hand of the king's daughter Thaisa. Pericles is told that Antiochus and his daughter have been killed by a fire from heaven and he departs Pentapolis to return to Tyre. The ship encounters a great storm and Thaisa dies in childbirth. Her body is put in a chest and washes up in Ephesus, where she is revived. Thinking that his infant daughter Marina won't survive, Pericles leaves her in Tarsus, where she is raised by the king and queen and becomes the object of jealousy. Before she can be killed, Marina is captured by pirates and sold into prostitution on Lesbos, where she cleverly retains her virtue. Pericles returns to Tarsus to find his daughter and is told she is dead. After several more adventures Pericles, now the king of Tyre, is reunited with daughter and wife; the play closes with Gower proclaiming the joys that result from living a virtuous life.

This first quarto of *Pericles* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century gold-tooled red half sheep, with comb-marbled paper boards. "SHAKESPEARE. PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE. LOND. 1609." is lettered in gold up the spine, between the emblem of King George III at

the head and foot. The leaves' edges are red.

Now in the British Library, this quarto was formerly in 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 collections 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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