

## **The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Richard II***

William Shakespeare, *Richard II*. London: Andrew Wise, 1597. 6 15/16 inches x 5 inches (176 mm x 127 mm), [76] pages, A–I4 K2.

The | Tragedie of King Ri- | chard the se- | cond. | *As it hath beene publikely acted | by the right Honourable the | Lorde Chamberlaine his Ser- | uants. |* [Simmes' device] | London | Printed by Valentine Simmes for Androw Wise, and | are to be sold at his shop in Paules church yard at | the signe of the Angel. | 1597.

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.

*Richard II*, was the first of four plays written by Shakespeare documenting Richard's reign and that of his successors, Henry IV and Henry V. It opens with Richard II deciding which of two courtiers, Mowbray and Bolingbroke, is guilty of the murder of Richard's uncle the Duke of Gloucester. Because Richard ordered Mowbray to kill the Duke, he decides to banish Bolingbroke for six years and Mowbray forever, the first step in Richard's downfall. John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father, dies and Richard seizes his inheritance; the nobles are angered by this, and they plot to bring Bolingbroke back. While Richard is fighting a war in Ireland, Bolingbroke builds an army, attacks the north coast of England, and when Richard returns, reclaims his land and then seizes the throne. He crowns himself Henry IV and Richard is imprisoned at the castle of Pomfret. An over-ambitious nobleman interprets one of Henry's remarks as a hint that he should kill Richard, which he does. Henry refuses to acknowledge his role in Richard's death, but vows to go to Jerusalem to atone for his part in the murder.

This first quarto of *Richard II* is bound in nineteenth-century red morocco with gold tooling. The spine is divided into six compartments. "RICH- | ARD | SECOND" is lettered in gold across the second compartment; "SHAK- | SPEARE | 1597" is in the third. The the turn-ins are gold tooled, and the leaves' edges are gilt. A stamp at the top of the reverse of the front free endpaper reads "BOUND BY C. LEWIS." Huth's bookplate ("EX MVSÆO HVTHII") and the plate "HUTH BEQUEST" are on the front pastedown. A newspaper clipping titled "Variations in Copies of the Early Quartos and Folios" and with the hand-written identification "The Critic. N. York. 13 July 91." is pasted on the front free endpaper. Extensive bibliographical notes by George Daniel, dated 1847, appear on the recto and

verso of the first front flyleaf.

Now at the British Library, this quarto was formerly owned by George Daniel (1789–1864), an accountant, as were many noteworthy book collectors; he was also a poet whose works included *Virgil in London* (1814) and *Democritus in London* (1852). He possessed numerous other choice volumes, especially of early English literature: the finest extant example (the Moore-Booth-Rokewode copy) of the First Folio, copies of the other three Shakespeare folios, and eighteen of the much scarcer quartos, among which this numbers. When the books were auctioned at Sotheby's in 1864, so esteemed was the collection that the sale catalogue was entitled *The Most Valuable, Interesting and Highly Important Library of the Late George Daniel, Esq.* This book was then acquired by Henry Huth (1815–78), a merchant-banker and book collector who spent the last three decades of his life seeking out rare books, visiting the leading London book dealers daily on his return home from work. Huth's was a general library of manuscripts, incunables, continental literature, and early Americana, with special strengths in English poetry and plays. His son Alfred Henry Huth (1850–1910) retained the collection and enlarged it through judicious selections. On his death the British Museum library was allowed its choice of fifty items, among which, presumably, this quarto figures.

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