

## **A rare early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Richard II***

William Shakespeare, *Richard II*. London: Mathew Law, 1608. 6 15/16 inches x 5 inches (176 mm x 127 mm), [80] pages, A–K4 (-K4 blank).

The | Tragedie of King | Richard the second. | As it hath been publikely acted  
by the Right | Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine | his seruantes. | By  
*William Shake-speare*. | [White's device] | London, | Printed by W. W. for  
*Mathew Law*, and are to be | sold at his shop in Paules Church-yard, at | the  
signe of the Foxe. | 1608.

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 fourth quarto of *Richard II* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red sheep with gilt tooling. "SHAKSPERE. RICHARD THE SECOND. LONDON. 1608." is lettered in gold up the spine. The turn-ins are elaborately gold tooled. Thomas Jolley's bookplate, signature, and "1809" are on the second front flyleaf.

Now at the British Library, this quarto was previously owned by Thomas Jolley whose collection was sold in seven sales over the span of a decade (1843–1853). It was then acquired by the nineteenth-century London book dealer/publisher Thomas Rodd, who sold it in 1845.

Octavo code: **sharid**