

## **A rare early quarto of Shakespeare's *Richard III***

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. London: Mathew Law, 1605. 7 inches x 5 inches (178 mm x 127 mm), [92] pages, A–L4 M2 (quire G is misordered).

The | tragedie | of King Richard | the third. | *Conteining his treacherous Plots against his brother | Clarence : the pittifull murther of his innocent Ne- | phewes : his tyrannicall vsurpation : with the | whole course of his detested life, and | most deserued death. | As it hath bin lately Acted by the Right Honourable | the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants. | Newly augmented, | By William Shake-speare. | [Creede's device] | London, | Printed by Thomas Creede, | and are to be sold by Mathew | Lawe, dwelling in Paules Church-yard, at the Signe | of the Foxe, neare S. Austins gate, 1605.*

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 III* opens in the period of peace and prosperity under the York King Edward IV that followed many years of civil war between the royal houses of York and Lancaster, England is enjoying. Edward's brother Richard, physically deformed and morally corrupt, plots to seize the throne from Edward. Richard connives and convinces Anne, the wife of a nobleman he murdered, to marry him; he then plots his older brother Clarence's execution and places the guilt on Edward, which hastens Edward's death. Richard becomes the Lord Protector of England until Edward's two sons are old enough to take the throne. Richard then murders the courtiers loyal to the young princes and the kinsmen of their mother, Queen Elizabeth. Richard is crowned king, and he imprisons the princes in the tower and arranges for their assassination. Richard's bloodthirsty reign leads a challenger from the house of Lancaster, Richmond, to gather forces in France and overthrow Richard. Richard, meanwhile, has had his own wife killed in order to marry Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth (his niece), securing his claim to the throne. Richmond invades England, Richard is killed, and Richmond becomes King Henry VII and marries Elizabeth, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster.

This fourth quarto of *Richard III* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red sheep with gold tooling. "SHAKSPERE. RICHARD THE THIRD. LONDON. 1605." is lettered in gold up the flat spine. The turn-ins are also gold tooled, and the leaves' edges are gilt. A note written by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps regarding the rarity of this quarto is pasted on the recto of the second front flyleaf. and a clipping from a book

seller's catalogue is pasted on the verso.

This quarto, before its acquisition by the British Museum in 1858, was owned by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps (1820–1889), the English Shakespeare collector and scholar whose *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* (1848) was published in several editions. Beginning in the 1870s, he devoted his time completely to the research of Shakespeare's life. Halliwell-Phillipps was instrumental in the acquisition of New Place, the site of Shakespeare's last home, and in the creation of the Museum at Stratford-upon-Avon (now Nash's House and New Place).

Octavo code: **sharim**