

## **An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Richard III***

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. London: Mathew Law, 1629. 7 1/4 inches x 5 1/4 inches (184 mm x 133 mm), [92] pages, A–L4 M2.

The | tragedie | of | King Richard | *the third*. | Contayning his trecherous  
Plots, against | *his brother* Clarence : *The pittifull murther of his ino-* | cent  
Nepthewes : his tiranous vsurpation : with the whole | course of his detested  
life, and most | *deserued death*. | As it hath beene lately Acted by the Kings  
Maiesties | *Sernauts*. [*Seruants*.] | Newly a[u]gmented. | By *William Shake-*  
*speare*. | *London*. | Printed by *Iohn Norton*, and are to be sold by *Mathew*  
*Law*, | dwelling in *Pauls Church-yard*, at the Signe of the | *Foxe*, neere *St.*  
*Austines* gate, | 1629.

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 seventh quarto of *Richard III* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red sheep with gilt tooling. "SHAKSPERE. RICHARD THE THIRD. LONDON. 1629." is lettered in gold up the spine, between the crest of David Garrick at the head and foot. The turn-ins are elaborately gold tooled, and the leaves' edges are gilt. "Richard Warner 1748 –" is written on the title page.

This quarto was previously owned by David Garrick (1717–1779), an English actor whose unaffected performance in the title role of *Richard III* in 1741 brought him renown. Garrick, both as an actor and theatrical manager, exerted a tremendous influence on stage practices throughout the 18th century; as a friend and classics pupil of Samuel Johnson, he brought reputability to his trade. He began to collect early printed plays during the 1740s, at which time most collectors regarded stage scripts as popular works unfit for inclusion in serious libraries. Garrick, however, recognized their worth and, assisted by friends and knowledgeable advisors, built his collection in the interest of scholarship and the enrichment of subsequent generations. He bequeathed the collection to the British Museum upon his death in 1779.

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