

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

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. London: Mathew Lawe, 1612. 6 13/16 inches x 4 15/16 inches (173 mm x 125 mm), [92] pages, A–L4, M2 (final line of text cropped off throughout).

THE | TRAGEDIE | of King Richard | the third. | *Containing his treacherous Plots against his brother | Clarence : the pittifull murder of his inocent Ne- | phewes : his tyrannicall vsurpation : with the | whole course of his detested life, and | most deserued death. | As it hath beene lately Acted by the Kings Maiesties | 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 Pauls Church-yard, at the Signe | [of the Foxe, neare S. Austins gate, 1612.]

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.

Now at the National Library of Scotland, this 1612 fifth quarto of *Richard III* is inlaid and bound in nineteenth-century half-leather with dark green straight-grained morocco spine and tips edged with gold rules, dark tan boards. Lettered in gold: "KING | RICHARD | THE III^D" in the second compartment; "WM. | SHAKESPEARE" in the fourth and "1612" at the spine foot. The signature of George Steevens and notes by Lewis Theobald appear on the title page; annotated throughout by Theobald. The bookplate of John Patrick Crichton Stuart, the third Marquis of Bute is on the front pastedown; the bookplate for the Bute Collection of English Plays is on the back pastedown.

This quarto was owned by Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), an eighteenth-century Shakespeare editor, literary critic, and poet; in 1726 Theobald wrote *Shakespeare Restored*, in which he criticized Alexander Pope's edition of Shakespeare. The quarto was purchased in October 1744 by George Steevens (1736–1800), an English Shakespeare editor who collaborated with Samuel Johnson in issuing a complete edition of Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators* (10 vols., 1773). Steevens owned roughly fifty quartos, and his sale (13 May 1800) was the first large Shakespeare collection to appear at auction, where this copy was purchased by the English book collector Richard Forster. It was acquired by the first Marquis of Bute from Forster's 1806 sale. Stuart added it to the Bute Collection of early English plays that was initially formed by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) and expanded by her son-in-law John Stuart, third Earl of Bute. Lady Mary's

grandson, the first Marquis of Bute notably acquired 39 Shakespeare quartos. The collection contains 1,266 English plays and includes seventeenth- and eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and examples of the foremost dramatists from Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, and Restoration periods; also included are a number of promptbooks. The Bute Collection is now in the National Library of Scotland, which purchased it from Major Michael Crichton Stuart on April 3, 1956.

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