

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Richard II*

William Shakespeare, *Richard II*. London: Mathew Law, 1615. 6 3/4 inches x 4 3/4 inches (171 mm x 121 mm), [78] pages, A–K4 (-K4 blank).

THE | Tragedie of King | Richard the Se- | cond : | *With new additions of the Parliament Sceane,*
| *and the deposing of King | Richard.* | As it hath been lately acted by the Kinges | Maiesties
seruants, at the Globe. | By WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE. | [ornament] | At LONDON, | Printed for
Mathew Law, and are to be sold | at his shop in Paules Church-yard, at the | signe of the Foxe. |
1615.

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 fifth quarto of *Richard II*, now at the National Library of Scotland is inlaid and bound in half red morocco over marbled paper boards. Lettered in gold up the spine "KING RICHARD SECOND SHAKESPEARE". 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. The signature of George Steevens is on the title page; annotated by Steevens throughout.

This quarto was previously owned by George Steevens (1736–1800). He was 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). He owned roughly fifty quartos, and his sale (13 May 1800) was the first large Shakespeare collection to appear at auction. This copy was a duplicate in Steevens' collection and was not part of the 1800 sale. It was purchased by John Stuart, the first Marquis of Bute (1744–1814). 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. 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 3 April 1956.

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