

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

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. London: Mathew Law, 1605. 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. | *Conteining his treacherous Plots against his brother | Clarence* : the pittifull murder 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*, purchased by the Bodleian Library in 1840, is bound in brown half calf with gilt-ruled borders and marbled paper boards. "SHAKESPEARE'S KING RICHARD III." is lettered in gold up the spine between double gold rules and lute ornaments. No marks indicating previous ownership are to be found in this copy.

Octavo code: **sharji**