

The rare 1611 quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. London: John Smethwicke, 1611. 6 13/16 inches x 4 3/4 inches (173 mm x 121 mm), [104] pages, [A]2 B–N4 O2 (first leaf blank).

THE | TRAGEDY | OF | HAMLET | Prince of Denmarke. | **by** | **VWilliam Shakespeare.** | Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much | againe as it was, according to the true | and perfect Coppy. | [Smethwicke's device] | At London, | Printed for *John Smethwicke*, and are to be sold at his shoppe | in Saint *Dunstons* Church yeard in Fleetstreet. | Vnder the Diall. 1611.

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.

One of Shakespeare's most esteemed plays, *Hamlet* is the story of the troubled prince of Denmark and the events that unfold when he becomes aware that his father was killed by his uncle, now his stepfather. It is a tragedy of regicide and revenge with all the trimmings: a usurper on the throne, a haunting, madness, suicide, and mayhem resulting in multiple deaths — both accidental and homicidal, not to mention a foreign invasion. Hamlet's famous soliloquy in Act III of the play as we know it (the quartos are not divided into acts) is, beyond a doubt, one of the most powerful speeches in all of Shakespeare's plays.

This copy of the 1611 Hamlet third quarto was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red sheep with gilt tooling, which includes the crest of David Garrick on both boards. "SHAKESPEARE. HAMLET. LOND. 1611" is lettered in gold up the spine. The turn-ins are gold tooled and the top turn-in of the front board is signed "TUCKETT. BINDER. BRITISH MUSEUM." The leaves' edges are gilt.

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 eighteenth 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.

Octavo code: **shaham**