

## **The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Richard III***

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. London: Andrew Wise, 1597. 6 7/8 inches x 5 1/16 inches (175 mm x 129 mm), [94] pages, A–M4 (-M4, blank?).

[ornament] | The tragedie of | King Richard the third. | Containing, | His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence : | the pittiefull murder of his iunocent nephews : | his tyrannicall vsurpation : | with the whole course | of his detested life, | and most deserued death. | As it hath beene lately Acted by the | Right honourable the Lord Chamber- | laine his seruants. | [ornament] | At London | ¶ Printed by Valentine Sims, for Andrew Wise, | dwelling in Paules Chuch-yard, at the | Signe of the Angell. | 1597.

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 first quarto of *Richard III* is bound in nineteenth-century dark red morocco, gold tooled and with the monogram "GD" (George Daniel) in the center of the front board. "SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD THE THIRD. 1597." is lettered in gold up the spine, which is light brown. The turn-ins are gold tooled, and the leaves' edges are gilt. Huth's bookplate ("EX MVSAEO HVTHII") and the plate "HUTH BEQUEST" are on the front pastedown.

Now in the British Library, this quarto was previously in the library of Richard Heber (1773–1833), a British bibliophile who began to amass a classical collection as an undergraduate at Oxford, but broadened his collection to include rare editions of early English drama and literature. He purchased both single volumes and entire libraries and did not limit himself to a single copy of any particular book. As a result, he owned at least 150,000 volumes, and his collection filled eight houses. He was member of Parliament for Oxford University (1821–26) and a founder of the Athenaeum Club in London. The book then passed to Thomas Thorpe (1791–1851), one of London's foremost book dealers from the 1820s until his death, and from Thorpe to George Daniel (1789–1864) an accountant, as were many noteworthy book collectors; he was also a poet whose works included *Virgil in London* (1814) and *Democritus in London* (1852). He possessed numerous other choice volumes, especially of early English literature: the finest extant example (the Moore-Booth-Rokewode copy) of the First Folio, copies of the other three Shakespeare folios, and eighteen of the much scarcer quartos, among which this numbers. When the books were auctioned at Sotheby's in 1864, so esteemed was the collection that the sale catalogue was entitled *The Most Valuable, Interesting and Highly Important Library of the Late George Daniel, Esq.* This book was then acquired by Henry Huth (1815–78), a merchant-banker and book collector who spent the last three decades of his life seeking out rare books, visiting the leading London book dealers daily on his return home from work. Huth's was a general library of manuscripts, incunables, continental literature, and early Americana, with special strengths in English poetry and plays. His son Alfred Henry Huth (1850–1910) retained the collection and enlarged it through judicious selections. On

his death the British Museum library was allowed its choice of fifty items, among which, presumably, this quarto figures.

Octavo code: **sharii**