

A rare early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*. London: Mathew Law, 1622. 6 13/16 inches x 5 inches (173 mm x 121 mm), [80] pages, A–K4.

The | historie | of | Henry the Fourth. | With the Battell at *Shrewseburie*,
betweene | the King, and Lord *Henry Percy*, surnamed | *Henry Hotspur of*
the North. | With the humorous conceits of Sir | *Iohn Falstaffe*. | Newly
corrected. | By *William Shake-speare*. | [ornament] | London, | ¶ Printed by *T.*
P. and are to be sold by *Mathew Law*, dwelling | in *Pauls* Church-yard, at the
Signe of the *Foxe*, neere | *S. Austines* gate. 1622.

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.

Henry IV, Part 1 begins where *Richard II* (1595) leaves off — following Henry's usurpation and Richard's death. Henry immediately faces rebellion by supporters of Richard. In the climax of the play, a rebel force led by the Percy family of Northumberland that sought to join a group of Welsh rebels is engaged by the forces of Henry IV in the Battle of Shrewsbury (21 July 1403). Henry's men, led by Prince Hal his young son, win the battle, although casualties are high on both sides. Ironically, the Percy family had assisted Henry only three years before in deposing Richard. But when land in Cumbria that the Percys felt were their just reward was given to a rival, they were greatly offended and joined the uprising against Henry.

This 1622 sixth quarto of *Henry IV, Part 1*, now in the British Library, was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red half sheep with gold tooling and boards covered with comb-marbled paper.

“SHAKESPEARE. THE HISTORIE OF HENRY THE FOURTH. LOND. 1622.” is lettered in gold up the spine below the emblem of King George III.

This quarto was previously owned by George III (1738–1820), who reigned as king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 until his death. At the start of George's reign, there was no royal library to speak of; his grandfather, George II, had presented his library to the British Museum in 1757. In 1763, George III began his collection in earnest with the acquisition of the library of Joseph Smith, the former British consul in Venice whose collection contained many early printed books and classics. The king's agents attended many English and Continental auctions, and they purchased both single volumes and complete libraries on his behalf, steadily enlarging the royal

collection. In 1774 Frederick Augusta Barnard was appointed Royal Librarian, a post he held for the remainder of George III's reign. Barnard, with the advice of such men of letters as Samuel Johnson, enlarged the king's library in a methodical fashion, assembling a fine collections of religious texts, English and European history, classics, English and Italian literature, and such incunables as a Gutenberg Bible and a first edition of Caxton's *Canterbury Tales*. By 1820, the library included 65,000 printed books and nearly 20,000 pamphlets; George IV, who succeeded his father on the throne, donated the library to the British Museum in 1823.

Octavo code: **shahet**