

An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Parts 2 and 3*

William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Parts 2 and 3*. London: [Thomas Pavier, 1619]. 4o, [196] pages, A–Q4.

THE | Whole Contention | betvveene the tvvo Famous | Houses, LANCASTER and | YORKE. |
With the Tragicall ends of the good Duke | Humfrey, Richard Duke of Yorke, | and King Henrie
the | sixt. | Diuided into two Parts : And newly corrected and | enlarged. Written by *William*
Shake- | speare, Gent. | [Heb Ddieu device] | Printed at LONDON, for T. P..

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.

At the opening of *Henry VI, Part 2*, Henry, who ascended to the throne as an infant with protectors ruling in his stead, has reached adulthood. The Earl of Suffolk has arranged for Henry to wed Margaret of Anjou, in hopes of using her to control Henry. The action opens with the arrival of Margaret in England for her marriage to Henry (1445). The Duke of Gloucester opposes the match, leading Suffolk to arrest Gloucester for treason and, later, to arrange for his murder. Popular pressure forces Henry to banish Suffolk; Suffolk is murdered by pirates on his

way to France and is mourned by Margaret, his lover. Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, meanwhile, has been quietly plotting against Henry, convinced that his claim to the throne has more legitimacy than Henry's. York enters into open conflict with the Lancastrian forces of Henry in the first Battle of St. Albans (1455), the opening salvo in the Wars of the Roses.

Henry VI, Part 3 takes the three-part tale of the hapless Henry VI to its conclusion. Following the Battle of St. Albans, Henry VI sees the victorious Duke of York on the throne as he enters Parliament and agrees, under duress, to make York his successor rather than his son Edward. Queen Margaret reacts with fury and leads the Lancastrian forces against York in the Battle of Wakefield, in which York and his youngest son are killed. York's sons are determined to assert their family's right to the crown and successfully engage the king's army, with Edward of York emerging as king. Henry is captured upon his return to England from Scotland, and Margaret petitions the king of France (Louis XI) to help restore Henry to the throne. Margaret and her allies have the luck of capturing Edward before battle begins and Henry returns to the throne. Edward is rescued by his brother Richard, and Margaret and Edward, Prince of Wales, are captured and the prince slain. The imprisoned Henry is killed by Richard in the Tower of London, who meanwhile has developed an ambition for the crown and plots to overthrow his brother.

Now at the British Library, this book 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 CONTENTION BETWEEN THE TWO HOUSES, LANCASTER AND YORKE. LONDON.” is in gold lettering up the spine below the emblem of King George III. The leaves' edges are red sprinkled.

This quarto was formerly in the library of George III (1738–1820), who reigned as king of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 until his death. At the start of George III'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 collection 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: **shahec**