

### **An early quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3***

William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 3*. London: Thomas Pavier, 1600. 4o, [64] pages, A–H4.

THE | True Tragedie of | Richarde Duke of | Yorke, and the death of good | King Henrie the sixt:  
| VVith the whole contention betweene the two | Houses, Lancaster and Yorke; as it was | sundry  
times acted by the Right | Honourable the Earle | of Pembroke his | seruantes. | [ornament] |  
Printed at Londou by W. W. for *Thomas Millington*, | and are to be sold at his shoppe vnder  
Saint | Peters Church in Cornewall. | 1600.

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 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.

This copy of the second quarto of *Henry VI, Part 3* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century red half sheep; the boards are covered with comb-marbled paper.

“SHAKESPEARE. THE TRAGEDIE OF RICHARD DUKE OF YORKE. LOND. 1600.” is lettered in gold up the spine below the emblem of King George III. The edges of the leaves are sprinkled red. “George Steevens” is written on the title page and manuscript note “This is only the third part of K. Henry VI. | The second part, according to Pope, was | likewise printed in 1600, by W. W. for | Tho Millington. | MALONE.” on the verso of the leaf on which the title page is mounted.

This quarto was formerly owned by George Steevens (1736–1800), an English Shakespeare editor who collaborated with Samuel Johnson in issuing a complete edition of Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespeare with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators* (10 vols., 1773). He owned roughly fifty quartos, and his sale (13 May 1800) was the first large Shakespeare collection to appear at auction. The book was then purchased for 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 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: **shahed**